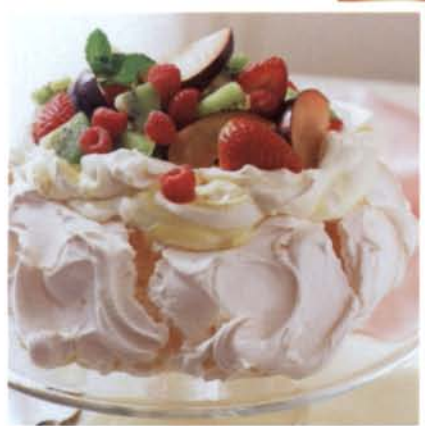


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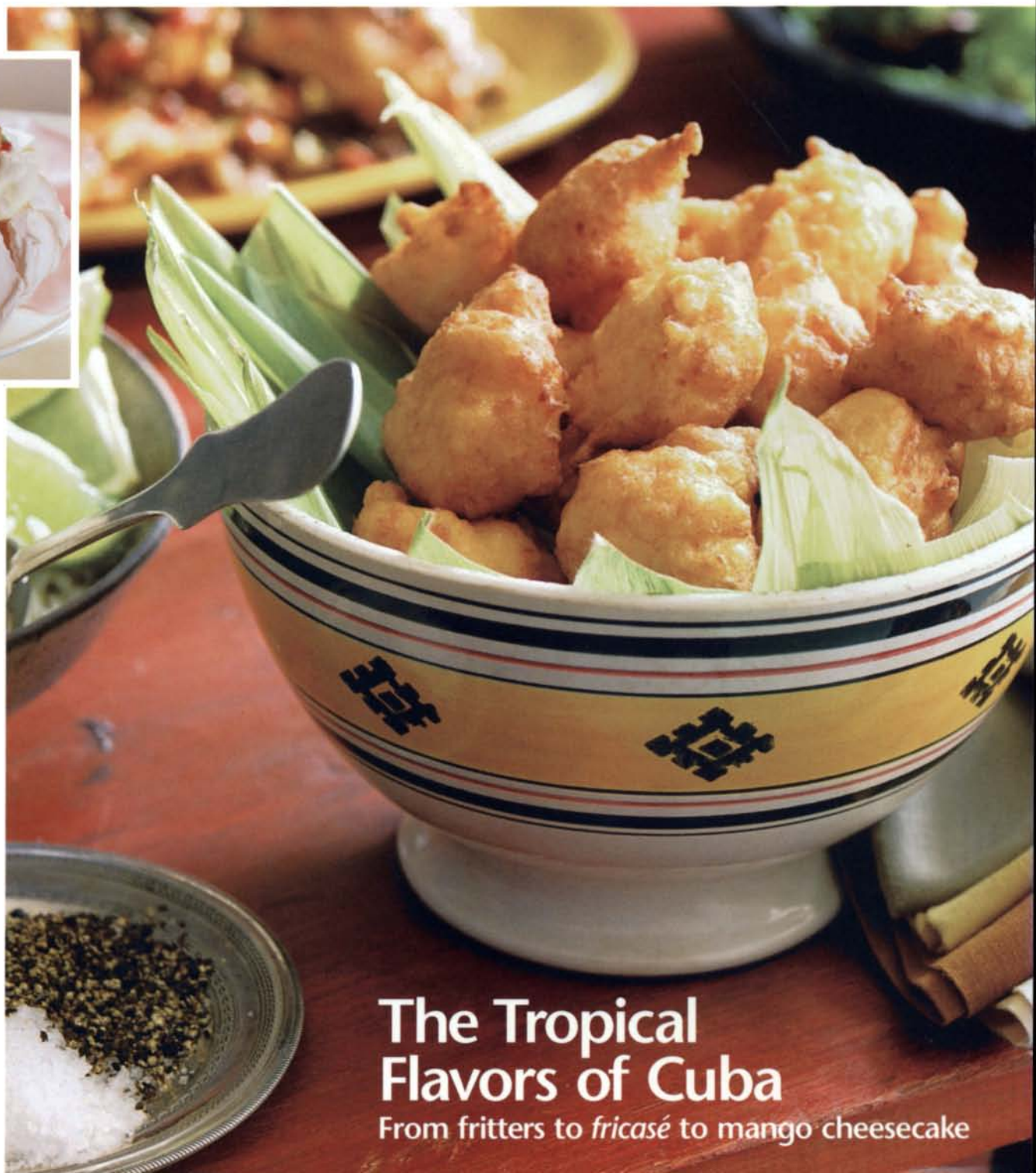
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JUNE/JULY 1995 ISSUE 9

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Cover photo, Alan Richardson; inset, Mary Ellen Bartley.  
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If you'd like to share your thoughts on topics like genetically engineered tomatoes, our most recent baking article, or your food and cooking philosophies, here's the place to do so. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

## DOING THE RIGHT THING WITH THE NUTRITION NUMBERS

I love the way the nutritional analysis is being handled as of *Fine Cooking* #7 (in index form at the back of the magazine). A benefit for me is that since it's all on one page, I can pick which recipes to try, according to the varied needs of my household members (with emphasis on varied). I like it much more than having the analysis after each recipe, and it has made my life simpler.

To all those who eschew nutritional analysis in favor of more "classic" information: I don't blame you for feeling attacked by members of the new "Fat-Sensible Society." But on a less fanatic note, there are many, many of us who are simply trying to do the best we can with manifold nutritional needs while nurturing the creative cooks within us. If more of life could be integrated in this way (that is, science joined with aesthetics), think how much richer our lives could be!

Also, thank you for being online. It makes it so easy for people like me (who have opinions) to let you know how we're reacting to changes to your publication.

—Erica Wilson,  
San Jose, CA

**Editors' reply:** We'd like to thank Erica Wilson for her encouraging comments, and we hope that many of our readers are benefiting from the new nutrition index (in this issue, turn to p. 93).

We also hope that, like Ms. Wilson, you find electronic mail a convenient way to send us your thoughts. And e-mail isn't just for letters. If you've got an offering for our Tips column, a cooking question for Q&A, or even an article proposal, send it to us by e-mail if it's more convenient for you.

If you write us electronically, we'll respond that way, but our response might not come as quickly as you're used to if you're a seasoned cyberjockey. While our editors spend lots of time in front of their computers, they also spend time away from their desks—tasting their authors' specialties, visiting our test kitchen, and other highly enviable chores—so bear with us: we'll be with you soon!

## DON'T MISLEAD US WITH "LOW-FAT"

I just discovered your magazine in the drugstore rack today. I've been reading it straight through (the article on Afghan food was what attracted me) with pleasure, only to be brought up short by David Everett's recipe for Low-Fat Mashed Potatoes (*Fine Cooking* #6, p. 51). Mr. Everett seems to think that substituting olive oil for butter and skim milk for buttermilk (which is commercially made from 1% milk, and home-made from skim milk) makes this dish lower in fat than the Roasted-Garlic Mashed Potatoes on the same page. It isn't; it isn't low-fat at all.

Since many people don't understand that olive oil has as much fat, ounce for ounce, as butter (albeit a "healthier" type of fat), it's a shame that a publication as sophisticated as yours allowed the perpetuation of this error (especially in referring to the dish as "butterless"). Some clarification in a future issue might help your readers.

—Doris Taub,  
Chicago, IL

**Editors' reply:** Thank you for pointing out some ambiguity in the recipe title for David Everett's mashed potatoes made with olive oil. We agree with you wholeheartedly on the need for cooks to understand fully the types and amounts of fat they choose to include in their recipes. We used the term "butterless" in the recipe introduction not to try to make it seem lower in fat, but because we thought this was a point worth making for those people who are limiting their saturated fats in particular. Also, olive oil gives the mashed potatoes a different, and delicious, flavor that many people haven't enjoyed yet.

(Continued on p. 6)

# C<sup>fine</sup> COOKING

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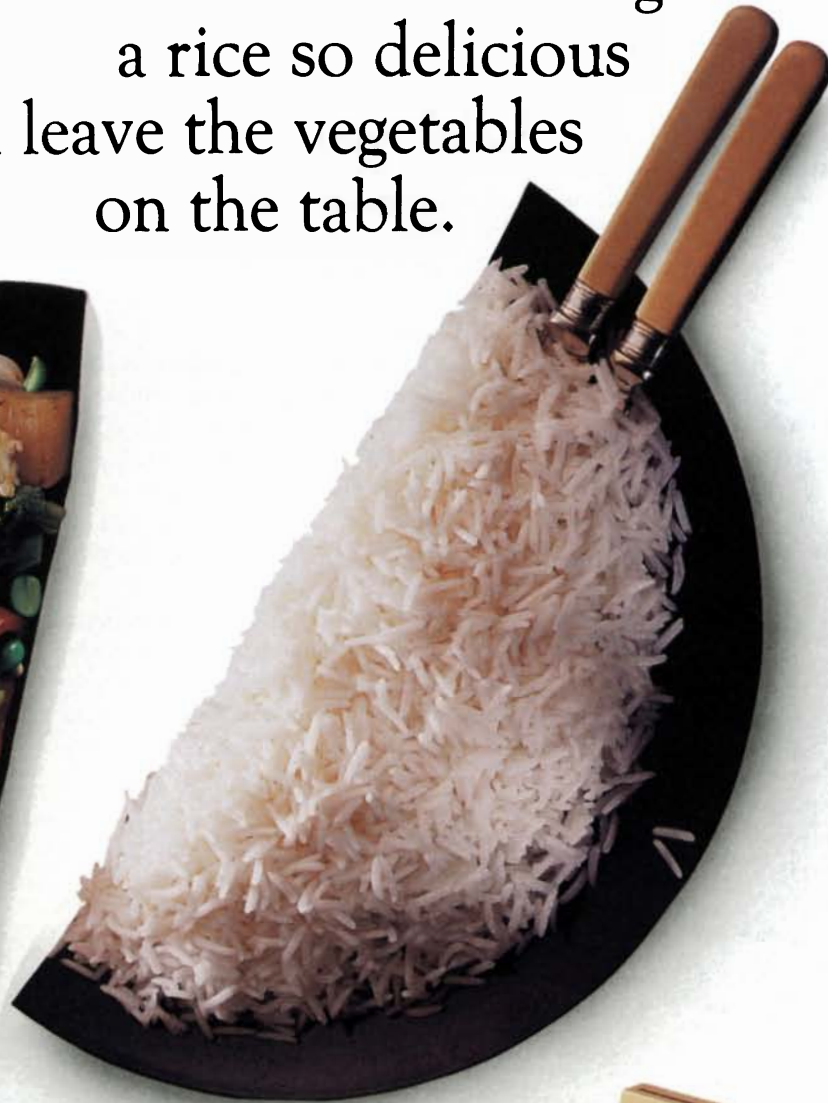
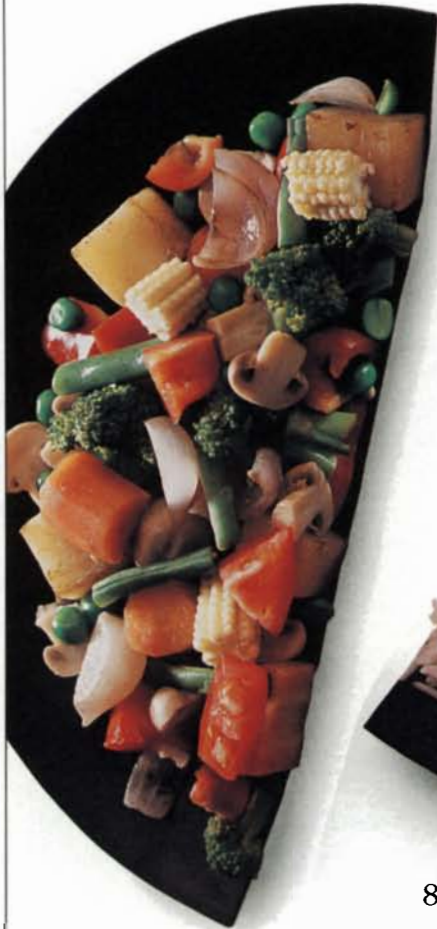
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## Writing an article

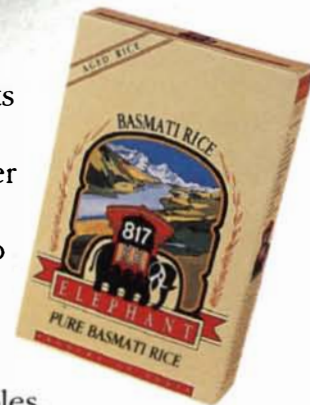
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The term "low-fat" in the recipe title is in relation not to the Roasted-Garlic Mashed Potatoes (which has roughly equal numbers to the Low-Fat recipe: 3 grams total fat; 22% of calories from fat), but to the Basic Mashed Potatoes, which have twice the amount of fat in the form of butter and use whole milk, and especially to the Super-Rich Mashed Potatoes, with *eight* times the butter, plus heavy cream—definitely not for those cooks looking to limit saturated fats.

#### CONCERN FOR SAFE SAUSAGE-MAKING

I'm a new subscriber to your magazine, and if every issue is as interesting to me as the first I received, you have a subscriber for life. You struck an immediate sympathetic chord with your article on salami by David Gingrass (*Fine Cooking* #7, p. 56). I did notice one glaring omission which I would like to bring to your attention. I did not see anywhere in Mr. Gingrass' article any discussion about proofing the pork meat.

Rytek Kutas, in his book on sausage-making, is quite emphatic on the need to follow the USDA rules for making uncooked dried sausage. To eliminate the threat of trichinae, the pork must be "proofed" by freezing it at specific temperatures and times that will kill any parasites.

I refer you to p. 240 of Kutas' *Great Sausage Recipes and Meat Curing* [PUBLISHED BY THE SAUSAGE MAKER, 26 MILITARY RD., BUFFALO, NY 14207]. I follow this procedure every year before winter with all my pork for dried sausage. I can't believe that Mr. Gingrass is ignorant of the requirement. I intend to take a shot at

salami next year, but wouldn't dream of trying it with "unproofed" pork.

—Michael P. Mazzola,  
New Paltz, NY

**Editors' reply:** David Gingrass agrees with Mr. Mazzola that using frozen pork for making dried sausage is a good practice for anyone who is concerned about the risk of trichinosis. You can freeze the pork yourself following the method described in *The Sausage Maker's* book, or you can buy "certified pork," which has been frozen by the producer and certified by the USDA as trichinae-free.

Fortunately, trichinosis from pork has been virtually wiped out in the United States. Dr. Ray Gamble of the USDA's Agricultural Research Service reports that the incidence of trichinae in pork has fallen considerably below  $\frac{1}{10}$  of 1%. We note also that the curing and drying process also kills trichinae in pork, though no research results are available specifically for dried sausages, only hams.

#### EAT WELL AND SAVE YOUR MARRIAGE

To the reader who reported that he couldn't roast chicken without creating an oil slick in the oven and smoking up the house (*Letters, Fine Cooking* #7): gustatory enjoyment need not preclude marital bliss! Your marriage can remain intact even while you enjoy perfect roast chicken using Mitchel London's high-heat method (*Fine Cooking* #4, p. 55). I, too, have violated the Clean Air Act producing this meal for family and friends. But I've developed a variation that allows me to roast chicken to

perfection while avoiding the problems you describe. I simply heap lots of vegetables in the pan and roast them along with the chicken. The vegetables keep the pan cooler, reducing splattering. Any splattering that does occur is intercepted by the vegetables. Often, the chicken is fully cooked before the vegetables are sufficiently browned, in which case I remove the chicken and place the skillet back in the oven to continue roasting the vegetables. The vegetables don't interfere with the roasting of the chicken.

Ironically, it's the vegetables that turn out to be the most popular part of the dish. Make no mistake, everyone agrees that the chicken is the best they've ever tasted. But the vegetables are always first to disappear. In fact, I bought the biggest skillet I could find to accommodate more vegetables. For flavor, this dish makes a one-pot meal that can't be beat.

—Stewart Merritt,  
Tacoma, WA

#### SALMONELLA—A MISTAKE, IN OUR FAVOR

We appreciate Molly Stevens' information about egg safety in the Basics department of *Fine Cooking* #6. It was sensible, nonalarmist, and reassuring to your readers.

One small point—I believe a zero was omitted in her statement that 1 egg in 1,000 contains salmonella. The actual figure is 1 in 10,000.

—Kay Engelhardt,  
Test Kitchen Supervisor,  
American Egg Board,  
Park Ridge, IL ♦

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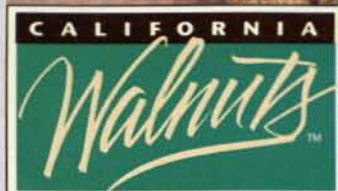
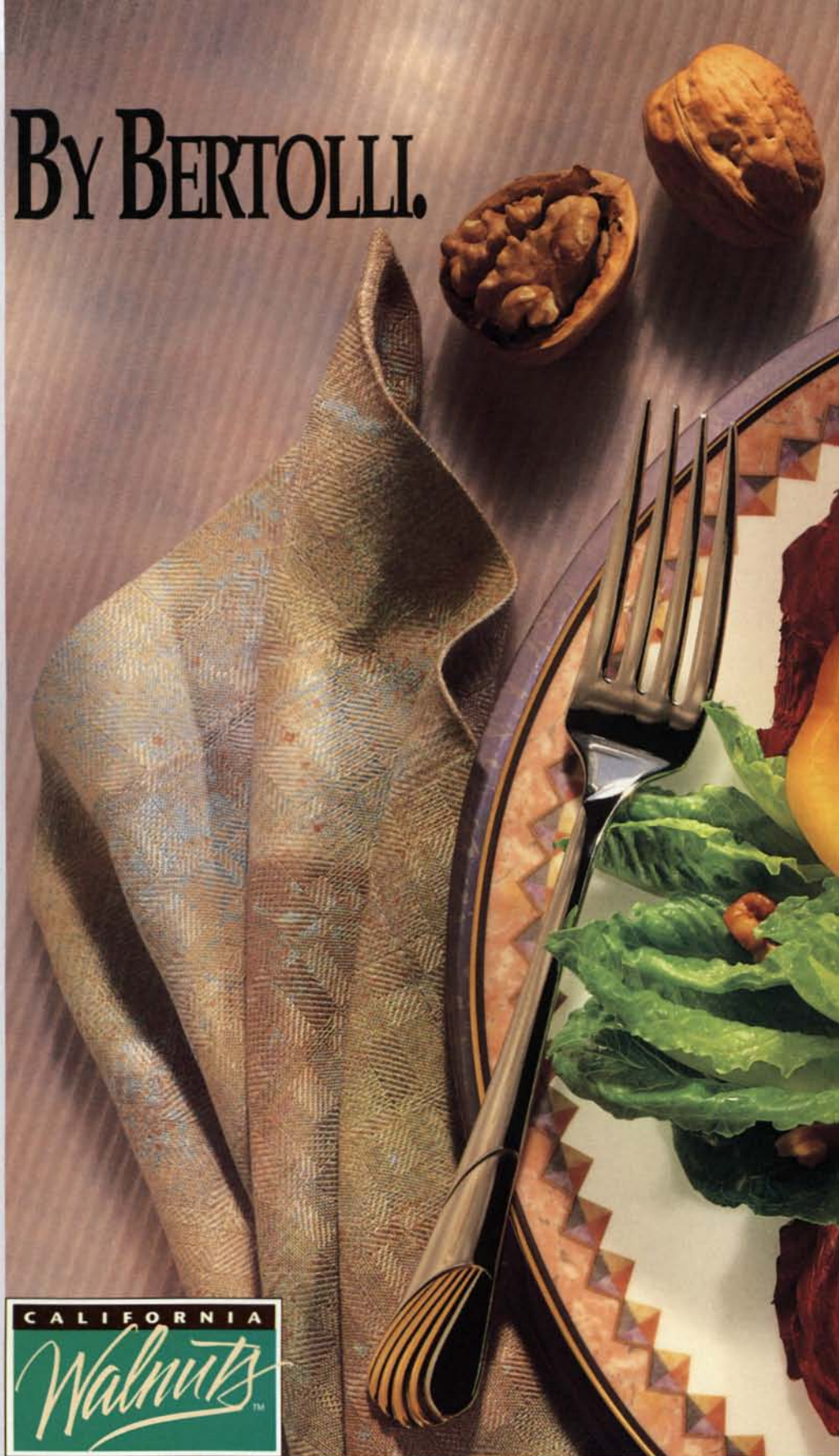
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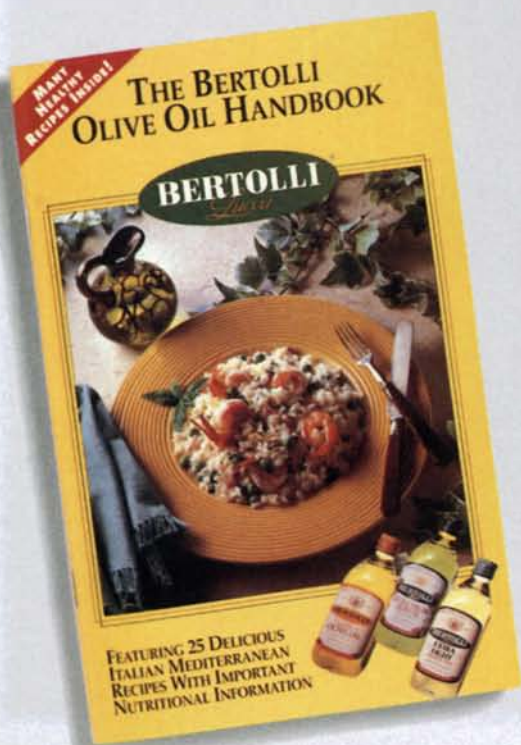
3 Tbsp. Bertolli Extra Virgin Olive Oil	6 cups torn mixed salad greens (select at least 3: arugula, radicchio, curly endive, romaine)
2 Tbsp. chopped California Walnuts	1/2 cup thin strips yellow or orange bell pepper
1 Tbsp. mild red wine vinegar (or fresh lemon juice)	1/2 cup finely sliced, trimmed fresh fennel, when in season
1/8 tsp. salt	Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese for shaving over the salad (Optional)
Freshly ground black pepper to taste	

1. Combine the olive oil and walnuts in a small skillet. Heat, stirring over very low heat just until walnuts are warm. Remove from the heat. Stir in the vinegar or lemon juice, salt and pepper.
  2. Combine the salad greens with the bell pepper and fennel (if available) in a salad bowl. Add the walnut dressing and toss the salad well. Divide the salad among four plates.
- Optional, using a vegetable peeler, peel wide strips of the Parmigiano-Reggiano over each salad. Garnish with additional walnut pieces. Serves 4.



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**KEEPING PESTO GREEN WITH LEMON JUICE**

*Each summer I grow my own basil and prepare pesto. However, when tossed with hot pasta, the pesto often turns from a lovely green to an ugly brown. Is there a way to prevent this?*

—Margaret M. Cole,  
Grants Pass, OR

**Shirley Corriher replies:** Basil has a natural tendency to brown when it's chopped or cut, but when it comes to pesto and pasta, basil has to fight an enemy outside itself: flour. Just a few minutes after being combined, the compounds in basil and the flour in the pasta will react and cause the basil's color to shift from green to brown. There are several approaches that fight this chemical reaction, but they all rely on one agent—acid, as found in vinegar or lemon juice.

The simplest solution is to put lemon juice in the water you use to boil the pasta. When this pasta is tossed with the pesto, you'll note that the tendency to brown is greatly reduced. Lemon juice can also be added to the pesto, or you can put lemon juice on the basil leaves before you chop them. Some chefs combine this technique with mixing other herbs into the pesto. Flat-leaf parsley and cilantro don't brown when cut.

As a measure of last resort, put the pasta on the plate and, just before serving, put a dollop of pesto in the middle of the pasta. Toss together and serve immediately. This way, your guests will have finished eating the dish before it has a chance to turn brown.

*Shirley Corriher of Atlanta, Georgia, teaches food science and cooking classes around the country. She is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.*

**THE LEMONY GRASS**

*How do you use lemongrass?*

—Elizabeth Hilts, Norwalk, CT

**Rick Yoder replies:** Lemongrass has a delicate, lemon-herbal flavor, and it's

not hard to put it to good use. Lemon-grass is a grass; it's green with a slightly bulbous white stalk, sort of like a woody scallion. Only the white portion is used in cooking.

Before you do anything with it, cut off the dry greenish leaves and peel away any dry outer layers. For flavoring broths, just quarter the white stalk lengthwise and add it to the liquid to infuse; discard before serving.

For using in sautés, fillings, salads, or anywhere else that you're mixing the lemongrass with other ingredients, you should first crush the stalk with the flat side of a large knife, and then either slice it or chop it very fine. Also, add lemongrass toward the end of the sautéing, or you'll lose the delicate flavor.

*Rick Yoder is the owner of the Wild Ginger, a restaurant specializing in Asian cuisine, in Seattle, Washington.*

**KEEPING BREAD FRESH**

*I know salt, honey, molasses, and other sugars help breads and cakes keep longer unrefrigerated, but how do they balance with the ingredients that promote spoilage, such as eggs and milk?*

—Joanne Kellar Bouknight,  
Greenwich, CT

**Shannon McKinney replies:** You're right to note that salt and sugars are good at preventing spoilage in food. Both types of ingredient inhibit bacteria, and sugars attract moisture from the air so they keep baked goods fresh. These benefits will indeed balance the fact that milk and eggs spoil quickly, but you should also remember that these dairy products are being cooked during baking, which stabilizes them quite a bit.

Shelf life largely depends on your surroundings and whether the product is protected from the air. Muffins are more likely to dry out and become unpalatable before they would spoil. The safest rule of thumb is, "When in doubt, throw it out." Shannon McKinney co-owns and operates McKinney & Doyle's Corner Bakery in Brewster, New York.

**Editors' note:** For a discussion of how sugar works as a preservative, see *Food Science*, pp. 80–81.

**ADD FAT FOR SMOOTH CHOCOLATE**

*What should you add to regular chocolate to make it the right consistency for dipping? Also, the chocolate I use to dip my homemade English toffee melts if held for any length of time; is there anything that can be added to prevent this from happening?*

—LeRoy Hilker,  
Los Angeles, CA

**Mark Gray replies:** As it happens, both questions are resolved by adding fat to the chocolate—but each problem requires a different fatty solution. To bring your chocolate to dipping consistency, you need to add cocoa butter to the chocolate. About an ounce of cocoa butter to every pound of melted chocolate will give you good results. Cocoa butter also makes the chocolate melt more easily in your mouth.

You'll need to temper the chocolate, however, before adding cocoa butter; otherwise, the chocolate will discolor when it hardens. There's nothing wrong with the chocolate if it does streak; it just means the fat in the chocolate has separated. Cocoa butter can be found at gourmet food stores and chocolate shops; chocolatiers are often willing to sell you some from their stock.

As for the problem of chocolate that melts too easily, that's a sign you're using high-quality chocolate. Still, if you want your chocolate to melt more slowly, add solid all-vegetable shortening to the warm, melted chocolate. You need very little shortening; for two to three pounds of melted chocolate, just a tablespoon of shortening will do the trick. Do not try this with cooking oil; it won't work.

*Mark Gray is a consultant to the confectionery industry and lives in Charleston, South Carolina.*

**SCHOLARSHIPS FOR FUTURE CHEFS**

*Is there a handbook that lists sources of scholarships or financial aid available to students who are interested in pursuing a career in the culinary arts?*

—Ali Morse, Paonia, CO

**Deborah Arnold replies:** Yes, there are several resources you might consult in search of cooking school funds. The



International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) sponsors scholarships each year; to get more information, call 502/587-7953 and leave your name and address. The IACP will mail you information about the scholarships, including qualifications and an application.

Another valuable resource is *The Guide To Cooking Schools* [SHAWGUIDES, INC.]. This book is updated yearly and includes information about hundreds of cooking schools (including vocational schools and culinary colleges) as well as a list of more than 100 apprenticeship programs. All schools are also ranked by tuition. You also might find the *Guide's* section on Culinary and Accrediting Organizations helpful; some of these groups may offer scholarships. To order the *Guide*, call 305/446-8888.

Other books that may help you include *A Guide to College Programs in Hospitality and Tourism* [COUNCIL ON HOTEL, RESTAURANT & INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATION (CHRIE)] and *FoodWork: Jobs in the Food Industry and How to Get Them* [ADVOCACY

PRESS]. All should be available in your local library. If there's a particular school you're interested in, contact its Administration or Financial Aid department; many schools offer scholarships.

*Deborah Arnold is the director of administration at the IACP in Louisville, Kentucky.*

#### FINDING NO-SUGAR CHAMPAGNE

*The most elegant champagne I ever tasted was called "sauvage." I was told that this driest of the dry has no sugar added and virtually no residual sugars. Sauvage is very hard to find and unfortunately too expensive to enjoy except at very special times. Please tell me which producers you can recommend, and is France the only country to produce it?*

—Susan Asanovic,  
Wilton, CT

**Rosina Tinari Wilson replies:** Take heart; the bubbly you crave may be more accessible than you thought. "Sauvage" is probably a proprietary name, and while it may be very expensive, it's possible to

get a reasonably priced sparkling wine that has been made without sugar. A producer of Spanish sparkling wines, Castell Blanch, sells "Brut Zero" for \$6 to \$8 a bottle. Some sugar is added to almost all champagnes and sparkling wines because the sweetness counteracts the wine's high acid content. However, for those who want a bone-dry champagne, this is a good way to go.

*Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches "Wine and Food Affinities" at the California Culinary Academy.*

#### MAKING EGGS SAFE IN THE MICROWAVE

*I understand that there is a way to treat raw eggs in the microwave that removes any possible bacteria, but doesn't cook them. Can you describe it?*

—Lauren Mahan,  
San Diego, CA

**Kay Engelhardt replies:** Food science writer Harold McGee has developed a technique for killing any potential egg

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bacteria. It can be done on a stove or in a microwave. While efficient, it's not an "instant" method, as using a microwave might suggest. The technique works best in batches of two yolks at a time.

To safeguard against bacteria in recipes that use uncooked eggs, beat two yolks until homogenized. Add two teaspoons of lemon juice or vinegar and beat again. (Acids like vinegar and lemon juice interfere with the yolks' coagulation.) Add two tablespoons of water if the eggs are large, two tablespoons plus two teaspoons if the eggs are extra-large. Beat again and pour the mixture into a glass bowl. Cover the bowl with a plate, and heat it in the microwave at high power until you can see the surface of the mixture begin to bubble. Continue cooking for several seconds more and remove the bowl from the oven. The mixture will appear curdled beyond redemption, but if you beat it vigorously it will become creamy. Heat the mixture again until it begins to bubble. Continue cooking another few seconds and then remove the

bowl and beat again. Cover the bowl, let it sit for one minute, beat the yolks again, and they're ready to use.

This method is ideal for making such yolk-based sauces as hollandaise, béarnaise, and mayonnaise, but the repeated heating makes the yolks more fragile than just-cracked yolks. Be extra-careful when cooking with them so you don't wind up with a curdled sauce.

*Kay Engelhardt is the test kitchen supervisor for the American Egg Board in Park Ridge, Illinois.*

#### BUTTER, CLARIFIED

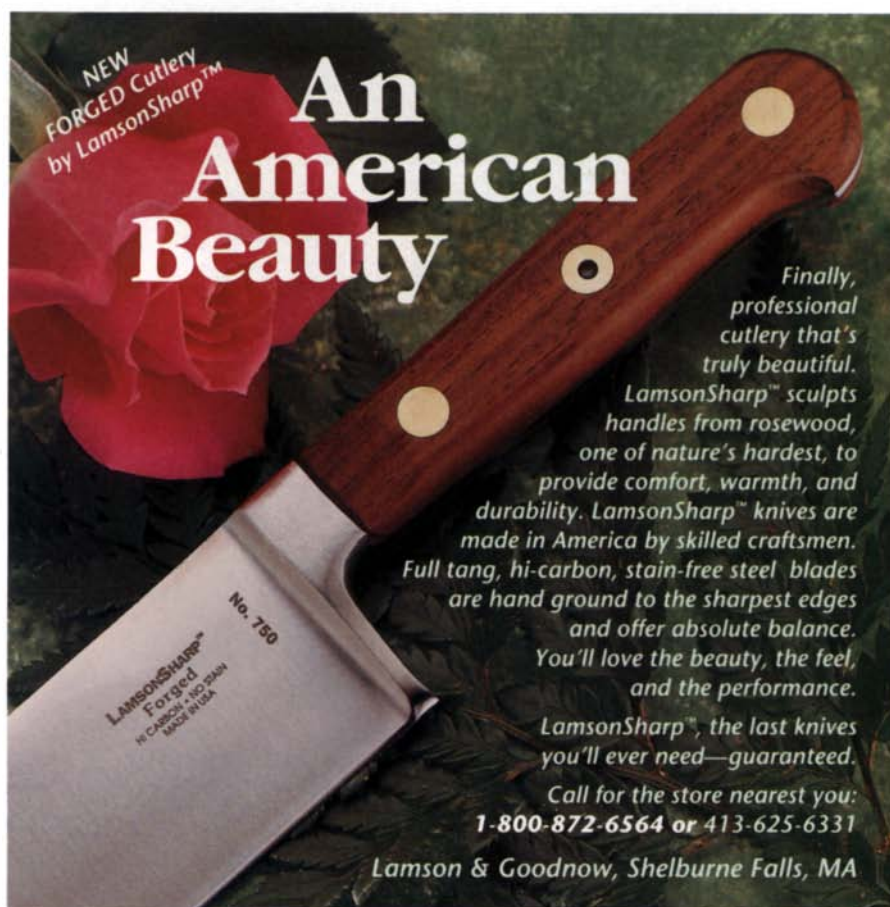
**What is clarified butter, and why do some recipes require it? How do you clarify butter?**

—Amy Whelan,  
Sacramento, CA

**Jack Johnston replies:** Clarified butter is pure butterfat, created by removing the water and milk solids from butter. It's useful for a number of dishes, such as sautés, which are cooked at high

temperatures that could cause the milk solids in whole butter to burn. Of course, sautés are often made with cooking oils, which have a higher scorching point, but clarified butter is a must when you want the flavor of butter while cooking over high heat.

To clarify butter, melt the butter in a heavy saucepan over low to moderate heat. As the butter melts, skim the white froth that appears on the surface. The butter's water will boil at the bottom of the pan and gradually evaporate. When the butter looks clear and no longer foams, slowly pour the butterfat into another heatproof container, leaving the milk solids at the bottom of the pan. When trying to remove the last of the clarified butter from the pan, you can use a ladle to skim off the butterfat without disturbing the milk solids. A pound (two cups) of whole butter will give you about a cup and a half of clarified butter. It will keep, refrigerated, for at least a month. *Jack Johnston is the chef at Parigi in Dallas, Texas.*



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## COOKING WINE ISN'T GOOD FOR COOKING

What's the difference between "cooking wine" and real wine? Also, how long is an open bottle of wine still good for cooking?

—Albert Pound,  
New Haven, CT

**John Ash replies:** I'm happy to report that "cooking wine" is disappearing from view. Traditionally, a cooking wine was a pretty awful wine with salt added, bottled by manufacturers to sell in grocery stores. This unappealing combination ensured that cooks wouldn't be tempted to nip into the wine. Today, what people now refer to as cooking wine is a wine that's not very distinguished, perhaps something you'd buy by the jug or by the box.

To my mind, the only rule for using a wine in cooking is to make sure it's one you'd be willing to drink. If you've had a wine in your refrigerator for a month and a half, you won't want to cook with it. The flavor will have been destroyed by oxida-

tion, and the wine will taste sour and unpleasant. However, if you have opened a bottle and want to save it for cooking in a few days, replace the cork and store the wine in the refrigerator. The life span will vary from wine to wine, but a white wine can last five to seven days, while a red wine can last as long as two weeks. If you have any doubts as to the wine's suitability, taste it. If you don't like it, don't use it. *John Ash is the culinary director for Fetzer Vineyards' Valley Oaks Food & Wine Center in Hopland, California.*

## THE SECRET OF CHICKEN SOUP

When I make stock, I use chicken wings and backs with onions, carrots, celery, and peppers. I let it cook for two to three hours, but it turns out very weak. What am I doing wrong?

—Leo Rasch,  
Bandon, OR

**Molly Stevens replies:** In order to achieve a full-flavored stock, it's essential to start with plenty of good, meaty

bones. Fill the stockpot with bones and vegetables and add only enough cold water to cover by an inch. A guideline to use while shopping for bones is roughly 1 to 1½ pounds of bones per quart of stock. For a truly superb stock, include chicken pieces such as thighs and legs with the excess fat removed. The total amount of vegetables should equal about 20% of the weight of the bones. Use fewer sweet vegetables such as carrots and peppers, since their flavors can dominate. The addition of an herb sachet (*bouquet garni*) will also boost the flavor of a stock. Try a combination of parsley stems, thyme, bay leaf, and peppercorns tied together in a piece of cheesecloth.

Always begin with cold water and begin timing only after the stock has begun to simmer. Chicken stock should simmer gently for three to four hours. Skim carefully and avoid rapid boiling to create a better-tasting stock.

Another method for creating a richer, more flavorful stock is to first brown the bones and vegetables in a skillet or a

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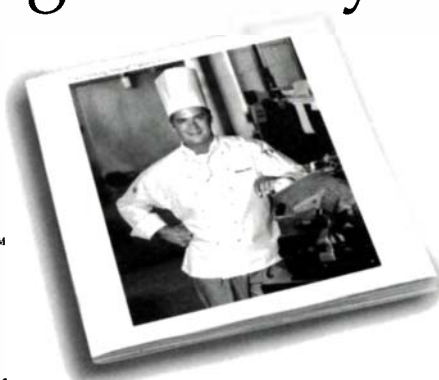
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roasting pan, either on the stove or in a 400°F oven. When well caramelized, put the bones and vegetables in a stockpot, pour off the grease, deglaze the pan with cold water, add this liquid to the stockpot, and fill the rest of the way with more cold water. This will produce a deeper-colored brown chicken stock. Although the color may not be suitable for all recipes, it has an undeniably rich and full flavor.

*Molly Stevens is a chef/instructor at the New England Culinary Institute in Essex, Vermont, and a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.*

#### STARTER READY—YOGURT SET?

*I have been making my own yogurt, using a freeze-dried starter, but the yogurt sometimes fails to set. What can I do?*

—Evelyn Kamstra,  
Glendale, AZ

**Dr. W. J. Harper replies:** Commercial starters are generally reliable; however, there are several factors you should look after to ensure your yogurt sets every time. The starter must be fresh, and should be stored in the refrigerator. When starters get warm, they tend to deteriorate. Also, freeze-dried starters sometimes lose their strength over time; check that yours hasn't passed its expiration date. Temperature control is also important. If your milk falls below 72°F during incubation, the starter can fail to activate. Last, you should always make yogurt with scrupulously clean equipment. It should be free of any evidence of past yogurt batches and should be rinsed well after washing. Any leftover cleanser can prevent the yogurt from setting.

*Dr. W. J. Harper is a professor of Food Science & Technology at Ohio State University in Columbus.*

#### WHAT IS FROMAGE FRAIS?

*What is the U.S. (or Canadian) equivalent to fromage frais, which is sold in Britain and France?*

—Valerie Gayton-Caspersen,  
Victoria, BC

**Ricki Carroll replies:** *Fromage frais* translates literally from French as “fresh

cheese,” and that’s essentially what it is. It’s a simple cheese made with milk and a culture, and the technique is identical to making yogurt. The texture of *fromage frais* depends on how long—or if—you drain the cheese after the culture incubates in the milk. Some people know *fromage frais* as a runny cheese that has a texture similar to that of yogurt. Others think of *fromage frais* as being spreadable, and closer in style to cream cheese. *Fromage frais*, also called *fromage blanc* (“white cheese”), is sold next to yogurt in French grocery stores, and like yogurt, it’s often flavored with fruit. Unfortunately, *fromage frais* is not commonly found in our grocery stores, but it’s very simple to make at home.

Depending on how rich you want the final result to be, *fromage frais* can be made from any type of milk, cream, or a combination of the two. If you want the sort of *fromage frais* common in Europe, it would probably be best to use light cream. To make your own *fromage frais*, begin by heating milk to 175°F. Cool the milk to 75° and add a package of *fromage blanc* culture. Let the milk sit overnight, and in the morning you’ll have a somewhat runny *fromage frais*. For a thicker product, you can drain the cheese in a cheesecloth-lined sieve for as long as six hours.

*Ricki Carroll is the owner of the New England Cheesemaking Supply Company in Ashfield, Massachusetts.*

#### ONE SALMON, TWO CURES

*What is the difference between smoked salmon and lox?*

—Louisa Ryder,  
Dallas, TX

**Manny Sklar replies:** The difference is very simple. Lox is the term for salmon that is cured in pure salt for about two months and then is soaked to get rid of the excess salt. Lox is not smoked. Smoked salmon is salmon that has been cured (usually in a mixture of sugar and salt) for a few days before being rinsed off and smoked for about 12 hours. Smoked salmon has a much milder taste than lox does, and it’s usually much more expensive.

*Manny Sklar is the smoked fish buyer for Zabars in New York City.* ♦

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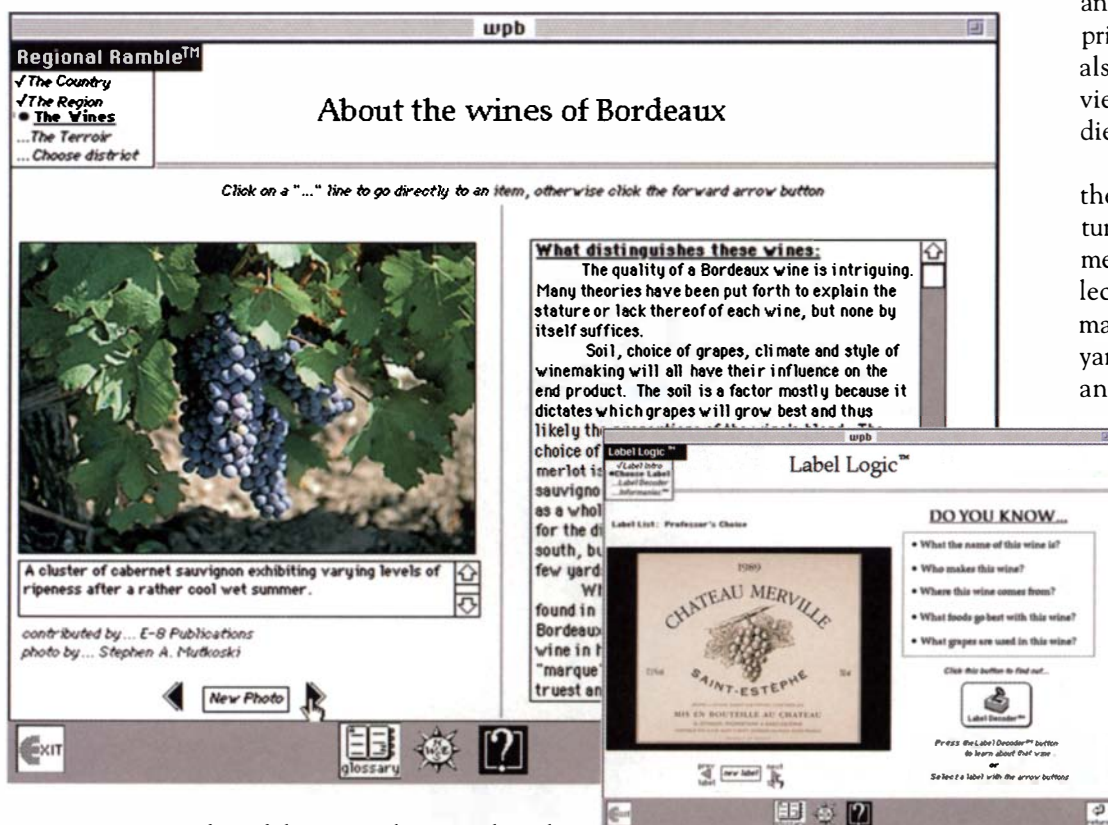
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## Click Your Way through Bordeaux Country with a Useful New CD-ROM



I'm a fan of the printed page. Though the new frontier in culinary publishing seems to be multimedia products (CD-ROMs), I'm not convinced that interactive CDs are truly useful for cooking. But I was intrigued by a press release for an interactive computer program on wine. This topic on CD-ROM made more sense to me, and since I don't want to miss out on all the fun that people seem to be having with electronics, I thought I'd give it a try.

The CD is called the Bordeaux Wine Professor, and it's the first in a series created by Stephen and Patricia Mutkoski. He's a professor of wine education at Cornell and she's a computer programmer; their company is called E-8 Publications.

The program isn't cheap (about \$150), but for your money you get as much information as you'd find in several books. This CD-ROM uses the medium's prodigious powers of information storage and retrieval to its full potential—the program packs an enormous amount of both general and Bordeaux-specific information in a format that's fun and easy to use,

*Learn about Bordeaux wines, vineyards, geography—even how to pronounce Labégorgue-Zédé.*

combining text, photographs, maps, video clips, and sound. I'm not very familiar with interactive CDs, yet I was able to follow the instructions for loading the program (which is the trickiest part). I used the Mac version; a Windows version is available as well. Once in, navigation is smooth, just a question of clicking on words or icons.

**The first thing you hear is the squeak and pop of a cork being coaxied from a bottle**—the Professor has a sense of humor. Your first move is to choose from one of three sections: an introduction to wine; a food and wine pairing section; and the main section, also called the Bordeaux Wine Professor.

The introduction to wine is very basic indeed and doesn't offer much more than textbook definitions and explanations, plus a slide show, but it's nonetheless useful as a refresher. The pairing section, called Food & Wine Winners, can be approached a number of ways: you can start

with a specific Bordeaux wine and ask for suggested recipes, start with a general style of wine, or start with an "occasion" and get recommendations on an appropriate wine as well as recipes. You can also browse through the recipes alone or view them broken down by main ingredient or by course.

While it's entertaining to flip through the recipes, each one with a color picture, this section seemed the weakest to me. The recipes are a slightly ragtag collection, some from well-known chefs, many from cruise ships, some from vineyards, some from E-8 Publications, and an occasional mysterious attribution such as "Martinelli." The recipes seem to have been taken verbatim from their sources, which means there's no consistency of style and many are expressed in "chef shorthand," with ingredient lists that include things like "5 pcs. each 65g veal medallions," "morel confit," or "sauce Café Opéra." Others are more user-friendly and have the appearance, at least, of having been tested by their creators. For me, the bank of recipes would serve more as a springboard—I'd look at the suggested type of dish or ingredient; from there I'd create or

find my own recipes. Whether you like the program's recipes or not, the section doesn't give any specifics as to *why* a dish works with a particular wine, which weakens the learning angle.

**The third section is the one I found the most valuable**—The Bordeaux Wine Professor. Here your path splits in two directions. The first, called Regional Ramble, shows varying formats that present general facts on the geography and climate of Bordeaux and specific facts about each appellation.

When you choose the second, Label Logic, you start with a specific wine—you can pick your own or, as a way of meandering through the program, you can let the program pick one for you. A photograph of the label appears on the screen, along with highlighted information about the wine. By clicking on certain words, you can learn the full name of the wine, who makes it, its classification, the location of the château, and



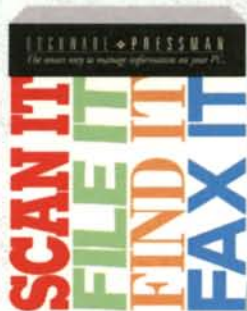
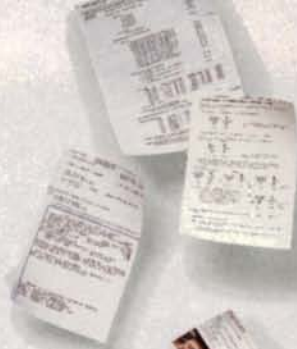
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more, including a good explanation of the *cru classé* system.

From either Regional Ramble or Label Logic, you can access what's called the Informaniac, which is a huge store of data, some specific to the wine or district you've selected, some relating to all Bordeaux wines. Informaniac has about a dozen options to click on.

**One of the most fun and practical sections is the pronunciation guide**, which shows the wine names written phonetically and plays an audio clip of the name being pronounced—not by someone with a perfect French accent, but by a competent English speaker. It's less melodious than a real French voice, but it's easier to imitate (and it's just plain fun to have the computer speak French to you—what would Gomez do?). A section called Serving Savvy brings you back into the realm of wine and food pairing; it also offers short video clips on serving. Peel Me a Grape has descriptions of the Bordeaux varietals; Viniculture Adventure presents a chart of winemaking. Vintage

Advantage is a detailed vintage chart with lots of production figures and other tidbits for vintage junkies; GeoGenius has interesting maps, starting with a world map (with France highlighted, in case we're not quite sure) and zeroing in on each vineyard. Local Color offers photos and cultural facts about the regions; Tasting Tutor offers basic wine-tasting guidelines. And finally there are two wine production segments with loads of comparative charts of yields, acreage, and more.

I say "finally," but that's not nearly all that's in the program. There's a comprehensive tourism guide with addresses and phone numbers for local tourist bureaus, recreation centers, bicycle rental shops, etc., throughout Bordeaux. A glossary can be accessed any time you're faced with an unfamiliar term, and a long bibliography is given—just in case you haven't learned enough from the program and you want to read more. The program also has a cellar notes section (CyberCellar) that looks useful, but speaking as someone who "lays down" wines for only as long as it takes to

drive from the bottle shop to my house, I can't really comment on its design.

I wouldn't recommend the Bordeaux Wine Professor for the casual wine drinker who wants only a passing knowledge of the major châteaux or who wants to know what to serve with an impromptu dinner, but for those who want to dedicate some time to the study of Bordeaux and its wines, this is a marvellous tool, offering information that would be hard to find elsewhere and that definitely would be hard to collate, cross-reference, and present in such an easy-to-use format. The suggested retail price for the CD-ROM is \$199; direct orders from the Mutkoskis are \$149 plus \$3 shipping. To order (and to find out whether your computer is souped-up enough to run the program), contact E-8 Publications, 121 E. Remington Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850; 607/257-7610. At press time, similar programs on Sonoma and Napa Valleys and Germany were scheduled for release in May.

—Martha Holmberg, *Fine Cooking*

(Continued on p. 20)

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## Not the Same Old Grind

Every coffee fanatic knows that freshly roasted beans ground just before brewing are essential ingredients for great coffee. But grinding beans has always been a problem for finicky home brewers. The common, inexpensive blade grinders (actually mini-blenders) heat the beans as they chop them; this can damage the oils essential to coffee's smooth flavor and leave it tasting bitter. And blade grinders offer no way to adjust for a particular grind, so the consistency of the ground coffee is as much a matter of luck as technology.

The best way to grind coffee has always been with a burr grinder, which is simply a small, electric version of a millstone, like the kind used for centuries to grind grain. Coffee passes between two rotating metal plates that crush the beans without heating them. The plates can be adjusted and set to consistently grind beans to the proper gauge for any particular brewing method. But burr grinders don't come cheap, ranging in price from \$60 to \$200,

as compared with about \$20 for a blade grinder. The Bunn Deluxe Coffee Grinder costs \$99.95, so while it isn't the cheapest, it offers very good value for the money.

Coffee grinders aren't known for their soothing sounds, but this model certainly rates at the low end of the noise scale. Its



*This Bunn coffee grinder lets you adjust your grind and won't damage the coffee's flavorful oils.*

hopper holds up to a pound of beans, and the machine won't operate unless the cup that holds the ground coffee is in place, so early-morning sleepyheads can't grind coffee all over their countertops.

My main complaint is that the knob to adjust the grind is, for some reason, set inside the hopper that holds the beans, rather than on the outside of the machine, where it would be easier to use. The machine is operated by a timer that's divided into increments labeled in cups ranging from OFF to 20 CUPS. As a measurement guide, the timer is essentially useless, and my advice is to ignore it. Use the higher settings for finer grinds to make stronger coffee and the lower settings for coarser grinds and weaker coffee. Grind only the amount of coffee that you intend to brew immediately and measure the grounds according to your roaster's recommendation. To find out where to buy the Bunn Deluxe Coffee Grinder, call 800/352-BUNN.

—David Baron, former director of sales and marketing for Torrefazione Italia, one of the Northwest's premier coffee roasters ♦

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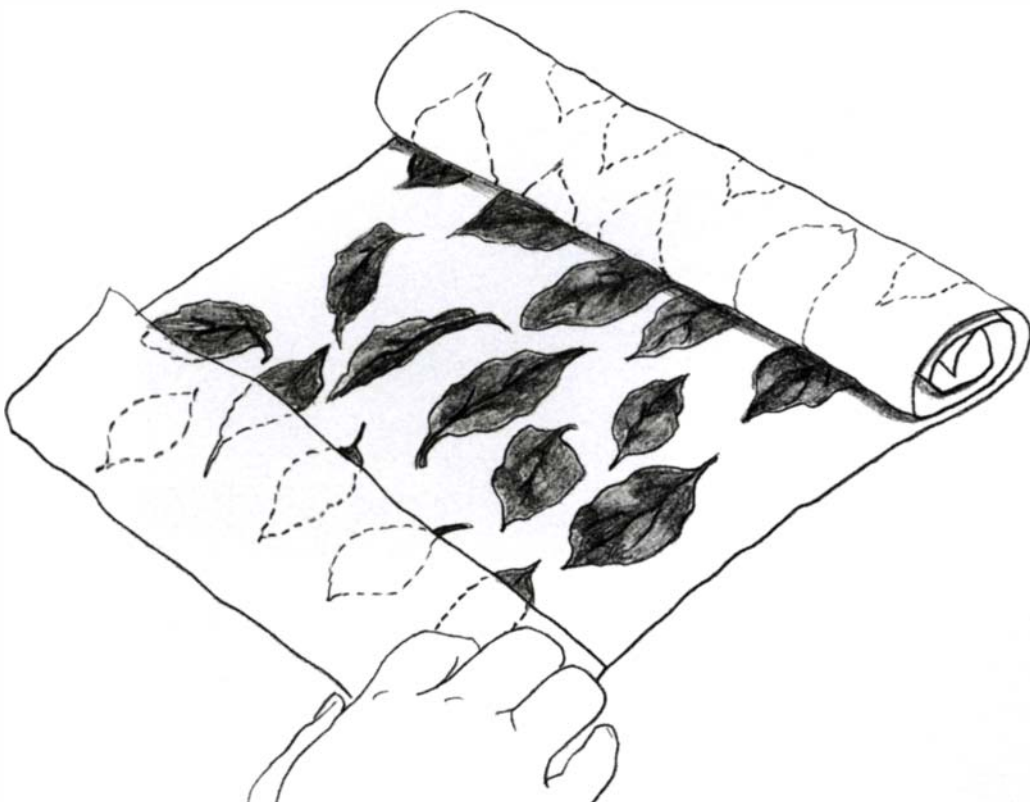
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in L.A. and *Nobu* in Manhattan; Larry  
Forgione of *An American Place* in  
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## Basil Leaves All Year

My garden produces lots of great basil during the summer that withers during the first chilly nights of fall. Here's how I freeze what I can't use, making August's harvest last through the winter.

Start by removing all the leaves from the stems. Wash and dry the leaves (I like to use a salad spinner for this last step). Next, take two yards of waxed paper and lay it across a table or kitchen counter. Spread the clean, dry basil leaves on the paper in a single layer, leaving the last foot of paper empty. Now begin slowly rolling the paper up from the filled end—just as if you were rolling up a carpet. It's important that the leaves stay in a single layer, so this can take a few starts and stops. Roll the last, empty foot of waxed paper to seal the package. Put the rolled basil package into a plastic bag and then

stow it in the freezer. When you need basil to cook with, simply unroll the paper enough to expose a few leaves, roll the paper back up, and put it back in the freezer. While the basil's color will have turned an olive green in the cold, the flavor is wonderfully preserved—better than dried basil from the supermarket.

—Margaret Kasten,  
Norwalk, CT

## Quick Deglazing

When deglazing a roasting pan to make a sauce or gravy, use a small bottle-brush reserved only for this purpose to rub off the caramelized meat juices on the sides of the pan. This is a quick and effective way to incorporate these flavorful bits into the gravy.

—Hannelore Brandner,  
Escondido, CA

## Heating Milk for Yogurt in the Microwave

A microwave oven with a temperature probe is perfect for heating milk for making yogurt. I stick the probe in the bowl of milk and set the microwave to simmer, which on my machine is 180°F, exactly the temperature for making yogurt. The bell rings and the microwave shuts off when the milk reaches that temperature. Cleaning the bowl is a cinch—no more scraping scorched milk from the bottom of a saucepan.

—Gay Hertzman,  
Raleigh, NC

## Mashing Avocado

For a quick and easy way to make a sublime guacamole, mash the avocado by putting the flesh through a potato ricer. The ricer gives the avocado a uniform consistency that is unequaled by other mashing methods. Be sure to mix in a few drops of lemon juice to prevent the avocado from browning.

—Antoinne Von Rimes,  
Santa Barbara, CA

## Odor Eaters

Paper bags from the grocery store are great odor-absorbers. I put a few bags in the bottom of my chest freezer and a few on top. The bags absorb odors that would otherwise give the frozen food off-flavors. I change the bags every couple of months.

—Stacey A. Poti,  
Prattville, AL

## Ready-Roasted Peppers

After roasting and peeling red peppers, I lay the pieces flat in a single layer in a heavy-duty zip-top freezer bag and freeze them. Whenever I need a small amount of pepper, I simply slide the entire frozen slab out of the bag and slice off a few slivers with a sharp knife. They're great in scrambled eggs! I return the unused portion to the freezer. If I need to use the entire package, it's easy to thaw the peppers by submerging the bag in warm water.

—Pamela Staveley,  
Edgecomb, ME



# THE NEXT PARTY

## Pork Satay Appetizers

Slice 2 pounds boneless **pork loin** into thin strips. Stir together 4 minced **garlic cloves**, 1 cup **soy sauce**, 12 ounces **Dijon style mustard** and 1/2 cup **honey**. Save half the sauce for dipping, marinate pork in other half for 30 minutes. Remove strips from marinade, discarding marinade and weave on bamboo skewers. Grill or broil 3-4 minutes. Serve with reserved sauce. Preparation Time: 20 minutes. Makes 16 servings.

*Nutrient Information, Approximately, per Serving:* Calories: 94, Protein: 13 gm., Fat: 3 gm., Sodium: 354 mg., Cholesterol: 33 mg.

*Nutrient analysis done by The Food Processor II Diet Analysis Software. Pork data from USDA Handbook 8-10 (1991).*



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## "Flouring" Pans with Cocoa

When I grease and flour a pan before baking a chocolate cake or brownies, I'm often left with a white residue on the outside of the cake after removing it from the pan. To prevent this problem, I use cocoa to "flour" the pan instead.

—Lori Graham,  
Sault Ste. Marie, MI

## Keeping Halved Avocados Green

To store halved avocados and prevent them from turning brown, refrigerate them flesh side down in a bowl of water with a little bit of lemon juice. The avocados will keep beautifully for a few days this way. The same method can also be used when preparing slices of avocado ahead of time for salads or garnishes.

—Janet C. deCarteret,  
Bellevue, WA

## Simple Herb Butters

I like to serve steamed or boiled lobster with an herb-flavored butter for dipping. I melt the butter and then steep a few sprigs of fresh herbs—such as dill, thyme, or lemongrass—in the hot butter for a few minutes for a lightly flavored butter, or for several minutes for a stronger flavor. Remove the herb sprigs and reheat the butter if necessary.

One of my favorite herb combinations is rosemary and lemon thyme; another is parsley, oregano, and thyme. Solo herbs, such as chives or basil, also work well.

—Marilyn Lull,  
Bow, NH

## Freezing Berries Separately

With so many berries available right now, I like to freeze some to use when they're out of season. I've found this method works wonderfully. After washing and thoroughly drying the berries, spread them out on a baking sheet, making sure they don't touch. Carefully put the baking sheet in the freezer without disturbing the berries. Freeze the berries for a couple of hours until they're

hard, and then dislodge them from the baking sheet with a spatula. Put the berries in an airtight container and return them to the freezer. This method prevents the berries from freezing together, which can damage their texture and shape. It also permits me to remove exactly the amount I need from the container for a recipe.

—Marguerite McIntyre,  
Bisbee, AZ

## Home Smoker

Your article on smoking fish in *Fine Cooking* #3 enticed me to submit my plan for converting a charcoal kettle grill into an electric smoker. I find this system saves work because you don't have to tend a fire, and I like the taste of the fish better than when it's cooked over charcoal.

Put a single electric burner with a built-in thermostat on the bottom of the kettle, passing the electrical cord through one of the vent holes in the bot-

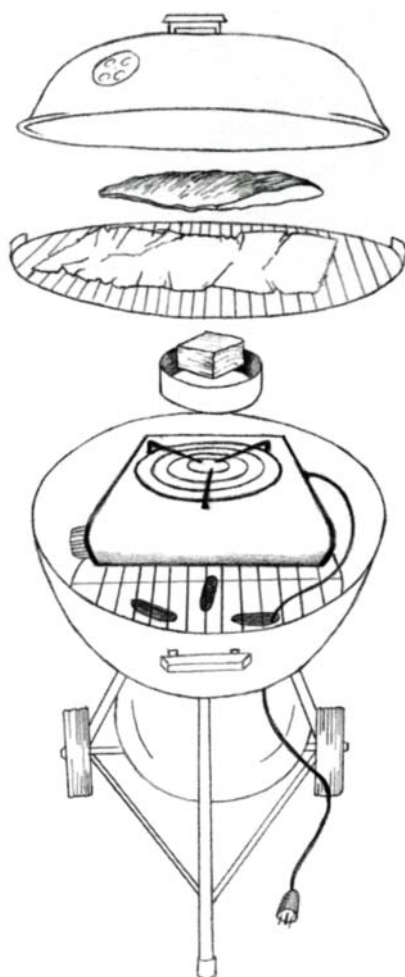
tom. I use a burner made by Rival, but other companies make similar burners. You can buy one for about \$20 at a discount store.

Put a small can on top of the burner. A tuna fish can works well; just make sure it doesn't have paint or a paper label on it.

When you're ready to smoke the fish, put the wood block or chips you're using to create the smoke in the can, and set the thermostat on the burner at 200°F. Put the rack back on the kettle, set the fish on the rack, and put the cover on. (If you're smoking oily fish, put foil or a pan below the fish so that the electric burner doesn't get covered with fat.) The fish will cook and take on a smoky flavor at the same time. Depending on the thickness of the fish, the size of the kettle grill, and the weather conditions, it takes anywhere from one to two hours for the fish to reach the desired internal temperature of 140°. Check the temperature of the fish periodically with an instant-read thermometer.

For safety's sake, don't let the unit get wet, and don't use the smoker when it's raining.

—Lewis A. Larsen,  
Eagle Grove, IA



## Souping-Up Canned Stocks

For cooks who don't have the time to prepare stocks from scratch, yet realize that canned stock or plain bouillon is a poor substitute, there is a simple and flavorful alternative.

Begin by preparing the bouillon as directed on the package. Pour this broth (or canned equivalent) into a large pot. Add chopped carrots, celery (including leaves), and onion. For every eight cups of broth, I use two carrots, two ribs of celery, and one onion. I also like to brown the flat sides of a halved onion in a frying pan and add it to the broth; this gives the stock a rich flavor and deep color. Next add about six parsley sprigs, a clove of garlic, and a bay leaf. Bring this mixture to a boil and then reduce the heat. Season the broth and simmer, uncovered, for an hour or so. Strain the stock through a fine sieve and cool. The result is a much more



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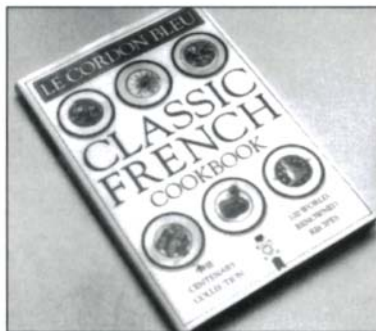
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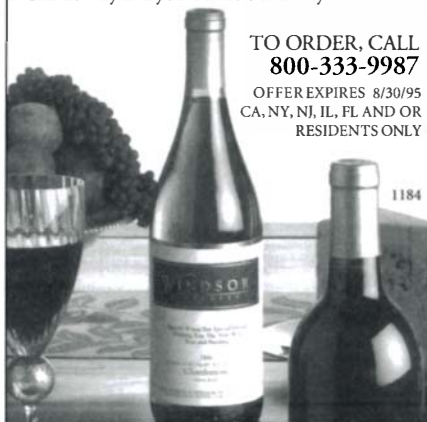
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- 3 green onions, chopped

Blend first 7 ingredients in a food processor or blender until smooth. Fold in tomatoes and green onions.

Variation: ½ cup chopped sweet pepper or red onion can be added to this delicious spread or dip.

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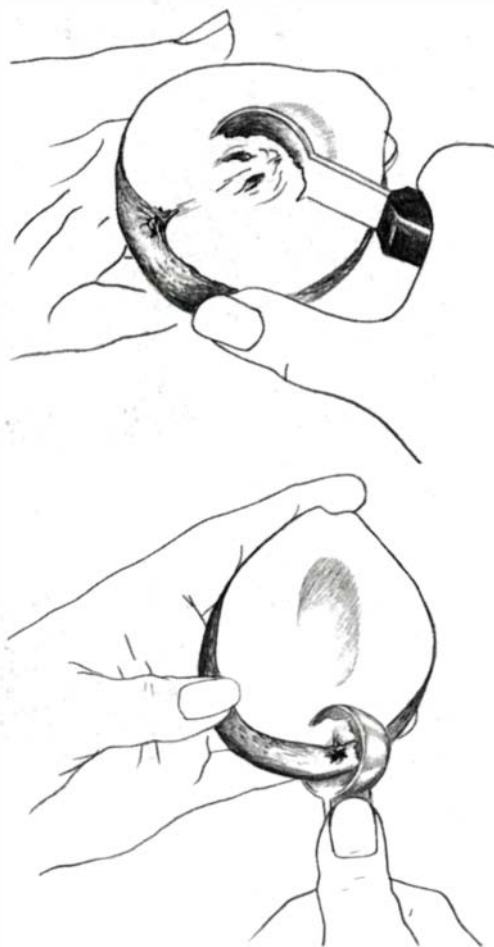
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flavorful stock than what you started with, and it's very simple to make.

—Jeff Backhaus,  
West Bend, WI

## Use a Scoop for Coring

A medium-size melon baller can do double duty removing pear and apple cores. Cut pears in half lengthwise and apples in halves or quarters. Scoop out the



core and the stem ends with the melon baller. It's faster and easier than using a paring knife, and very little fruit is wasted.

—Lillian Main,  
Victoria, BC

## Quick Clean-Up for Bread Bakers

My spouse raved over the freshly baked loaves but ranted over the state of the kitchen in the wake of my bread baking. This led to a few small improvements in technique that have tamed the messy demons of dough.

The first tip is to knead the dough on a floured plastic 22x18-inch pie-rolling mat (mine is Tupperware, but any will do). When you're finished, shake the excess flour into the garbage before washing. If your kitchen has a small sink, this mat can be folded in half or in quarters to be washed one face at a time. Then it can be rolled up and put away.

The second improvement in my technique is to use warm—not hot—water to clean up. Hot water seems to cook the dough, leaving a sticky mess. Also, I use an inexpensive woven mesh scrubber (Tuffy brand) for cleaning up. Its open structure doesn't fill up with dough as readily as a sponge or fine nylon scrubber would.

—David Kailin,  
Corvallis, OR

## Shapely Bread

To preserve the symmetry of their bread, most bakeries make longitudinal slashes in the tops of the loaves before baking. This allows the loaf to expand evenly until the heat sets the gluten network of the dough. The slashing method works well at home too, as long as your dough is robust enough to cut. But if your dough is on the softer side, as mine often is, trying to make these slashes can lead to stretching the loaves out of shape. To maintain the shapeliness of these more delicate loaves, I poke a series of holes in the top of each loaf with a metal skewer just before baking.

—Nancy P. Dowd,  
Lunenburg, NS

## Gourmet Hardware

My wife and I had been considering buying a hammer-type meat tenderizer, but they seemed to be rather costly for a simple tool that we wouldn't use very often. Instead, I found a perfectly serviceable rubber mallet in a hardware store bargain bin for \$2.50. Not only is it great for pounding out meat (we're fond of turkey breast scaloppine), but a well-placed smack splits open an olive for pitting and garlic for peeling. Our mallet has an aluminum handle with a rubber grip, and it does quite well on the top shelf of the dishwasher. "The

Persuader," as we call it, has become a welcome addition to our kitchen.

—Russ Shumaker,  
Richmond, VA

## Less Expensive Extra-Virgin Olive Oil

For everyday cooking, I like to use extra-virgin olive oil from the Middle East and North Africa, which I buy in a Middle Eastern grocery store. The Middle Eastern oil has a fruity, complex flavor and rich green color. I find that, overall, it's comparable to Italian extra-virgin olive oils, but it's considerably cheaper.

—David Auerbach,  
Durham, NC

## Centered Egg Yolks

When cooking hard-boiled eggs, gently twirl the eggs around while they cook. This centers the yolks and makes deviled eggs look better.

—Mary Jane Kaloustian,  
Northville, MI

## Aromatic Skewers

When I make lamb kebabs, I use rosemary branches instead of wooden skewers. I cut each branch about six inches long and strip off about half of its leaves. Then I spear the thick end of the stem through the chunks of lamb and vegetables and lay the whole thing right on the grill. The marvelous flavor of the rosemary enhances the food as it cooks.

—Kelly Danek,  
San Diego, CA

## Softening Brown Sugar

To soften hardened brown sugar, put the block of brown sugar in an airtight container, top it with plastic wrap, and then cover the sugar with a folded damp paper towel. Seal the container and keep it sealed for one to two days. The brown sugar will absorb the moisture from the paper towel and become soft again.

—Cynthia A. Jaworski,  
Chicago, IL ♦



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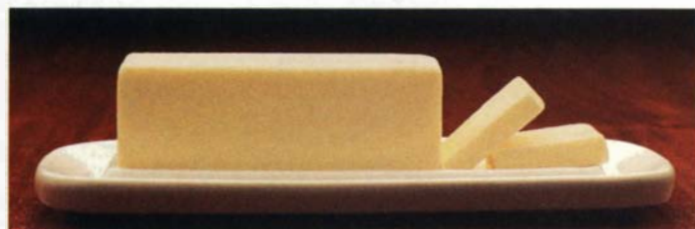
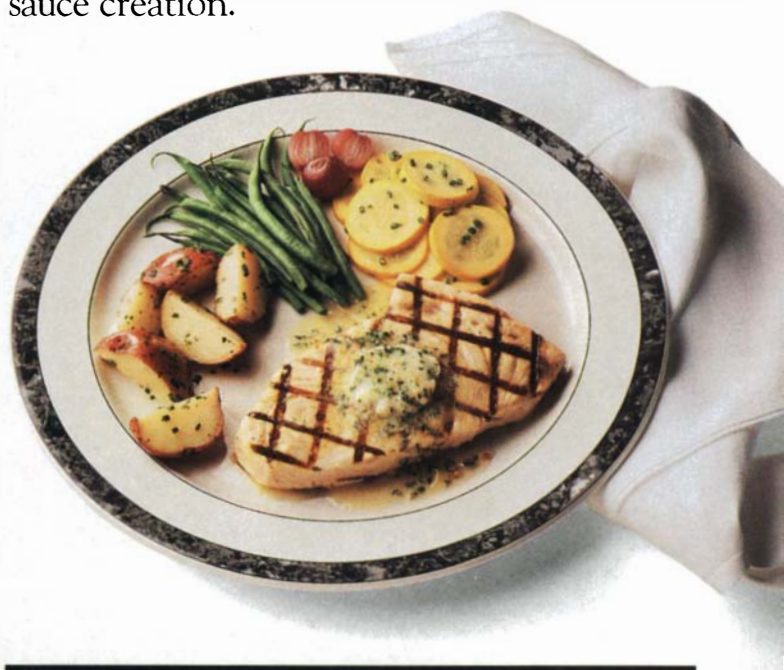
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# Arugula the Italian Way

Not just for salad, this peppery green is great with meats, pasta—even pizza

BY TONY MANTUANO



*Preparing arugula is a snap. Twist off the thick stems and the leaves are ready to be cooked or tossed in a salad. But handle it gently so that the leaves don't crack or bruise, like the one at right.*



I discovered arugula when my wife and I moved to Italy in 1983. Known as *rucola* to the Italians, the flavor of the crisp green leaves took us by surprise—nothing this green and lettuce-like should pack such a wallop. We had to have more.

We started to buy it daily from the wonderful produce markets, to eat as part of a mixed salad, dressed simply with extra-virgin olive oil and good vinegar. We also kept our eyes open to all the ways Italian cooks incorporated arugula into pasta, meat, and seafood dishes, as well as salads. Now back in our own restaurant in Chicago, these Italian arugula dishes have become an important part of our repertoire.

Arugula, also called rocket or *rucola* in English, has a distinctive nutty flavor that's somewhat pungent and a little bitter. Since bitterness is the taste that seems to be the most unappreciated by the American palate, arugula takes some getting used to for the first-timer. But once you've tasted it, there's absolutely no mistaking arugula for another green. Its flavor is so intense that it's often labeled incorrectly as an herb in grocery stores.

Actually, the fact that you can find arugula in grocery stores is a major improvement. Ten years ago, Italian restaurant chefs in the United States had trouble finding it at all, and when they did they often cringed at the high price tag. Today, it's readily available to chefs, many grocery stores carry it regularly, and it's even inexpensive at peak summer growing times. Although it's available year-round, arugula grown in the summer has the sturdiest, crispest leaves.

## THE FLAVOR IS BOLD, BUT THE LEAVES ARE DELICATE

Look for emerald-green leaves with no blemishes, spots, or signs of yellowing. The texture should be crisp and firm. Arugula is usually sold either in bunches with the roots attached or packed loosely

Photos except where noted: Ellen Silverman. Photos this page: Suzanne Roman.



*Sizzling steak, Tuscan style. Juices from the grilled meat mingle deliciously with olive oil, lemon, rosemary, and slightly wilted arugula.*





## Arugula oil—pretty, delicious

At the restaurant, we save the arugula stems to make arugula oil, but you can make it with whole leaves, too. This bright green oil looks attractive and tastes fantastic with beef or seafood. I especially like it with roasted scallops.

To make arugula oil, first blanch the stems in boiling water for five seconds to set the green color, and then dunk them immediately in ice water to stop the cooking. Roughly chop the stems and put them in a blender. Pour in enough good-quality olive oil to cover them by an inch and blend until smooth.

I like the bold color and flavor of this oil as it is when it comes out of the blender, but you can also let the oil steep for 24 hours in the

refrigerator and then strain out the pulp. This leaves you with a more delicate, transparent oil. Strained, it will keep up to ten days in the refrigerator, while unstrained it will only keep for a day or two.



*Save your arugula stems for colorful, peppery arugula oil. Blanch the stems briefly to make them bright green, chop them up, and then whirl them in a blender with olive oil.*

*Unstrained oil is thick and bold (at right), but doesn't keep long. Strained, the oil is delicate and transparent and stays fresh longer.*



in plastic bags with the roots and most of the stem trimmed off. Since it has such delicate leaves, I prefer to buy it loosely packed rather than secured into bunches.

Once you get the arugula home, keep the leaves crisp by sticking the stem ends in a container of ice water, the way you'd put flowers in a vase. The arugula will taste best if you use it right away, but if you must store it for a couple of days, wrap the stems in a damp paper towel, and then seal the arugula in a plastic bag.

When you're ready to use the arugula, trim off the thick stems and save them for making arugula oil (see sidebar at left). To wash the leaves, dunk them very gently in a large bowl of cold water, let them soak for a few seconds to loosen the grit, swish the leaves around, and then lift them out. Dry the leaves carefully with a towel or in a salad spinner. You have to be gentle with arugula; otherwise, it will bruise and crack, marring its flavor and appearance (see photo on p. 28).

### ARUGULA IS A PART OF EVERYDAY COOKING IN ITALY

Italians love arugula's bold and distinctive flavor not only in salads, but in cooked dishes as well. In one of my favorite pasta dishes, I toss arugula with hot spaghetti, fresh tomatoes, sharp aged sheep's milk cheese, extra-virgin olive oil, and cracked black pepper (see recipe on p. 32). The heat of the just-cooked and drained pasta gently wilts the arugula leaves to make a summertime "uncooked" sauce (see photo on p. 32). In this dish, the bitter arugula contrasts with the sweetness of summer tomatoes, while the cracked black pepper brings out the peppery nature of the arugula.

In Tuscany, where Chianina cattle grow tall and lean, a dish called *tagliata* (literally, "cut" or "sliced") is often seen on menus (see recipe on p. 32). While it's really a "restaurant" dish, you can easily make it at home, too. First you sear a cut of beef, usually strip steak or sometimes filet, on a very hot charcoal grill. The steak then comes off the grill and rests for a few minutes, still raw in the center. Slice it into strips, fan out the strips on a flameproof serving platter, and season it with extra-virgin olive oil, cracked black pepper, salt, and rosemary. Put the platter back on the grill until the oil begins to sizzle and the beef cooks a little more. Toss a big handful of arugula around the beef; the greens wilt from the heat of the platter as the whole thing is brought sizzling to the table (see photo on p. 29).

Along the Tuscan coast, cooks combine arugula with sweet, freshly poached shrimp and olive oil to create a warm salad. In Lombardy, there's a centuries-old—but still popular—recipe for capon salad with arugula, pine nuts, citron, roasted red



peppers, olive oil, and balsamic vinegar, which could very well be the first “composed” salad ever.

At the restaurant, we toss arugula with balsamic vinegar and arrange it on top of a hot mozzarella and prosciutto pizza (see photo at right, recipe below). We'll also layer arugula with oranges, red onions, and olive oil to serve with grilled tuna or swordfish.

I find that when I put arugula in a dish, it tends to dominate the other ingredients. It especially overwhelms most herbs: only fresh rosemary and dried oregano seem assertive enough to stand up to it. In most cases I think it's best to let arugula be the dominant flavor and leave out the herbs. In this sense, arugula is the “seasoning.”

### **PIZZA WITH PROSCIUTTO & ARUGULA**

When the pizza comes out of the oven, it's topped with a salad of arugula, sun-dried tomatoes, red onion, balsamic vinegar, and extra-virgin olive oil. This salad is also great on its own. *Yields two 12-inch pizzas.*

#### **FOR THE PIZZA DOUGH:**

*1¼ cups warm water*  
*2 tsp. active dry yeast*  
*1 Tbs. honey*  
*15 oz. (3¼ cups) all-purpose flour*  
*1¼ oz. (¼ cup) whole-wheat flour*  
*1 Tbs. salt*  
*2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil*

#### **FOR THE PIZZA TOPPINGS:**

*1 clove garlic, minced fine*  
*¼ cup olive oil*  
*½ lb. mozzarella cheese (preferably fresh), cut into large cubes*  
*8 thin slices prosciutto (about 4 oz.)*

#### **FOR THE SALAD:**

*6 oz. arugula (about 7 cups, loosely packed), washed, tough stems removed*  
*6 very thin slices red onion*  
*6 sun-dried tomatoes, diced (if not packed in oil, rehydrate first)*  
*2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil*  
*2 tsp. balsamic vinegar*

**Making the dough**—Combine the water, yeast, and honey in a large mixing bowl or in the bowl of a stationary mixer. Allow to sit until foamy, about 5 min. Add the remaining ingredients and stir until incorporated. Knead by hand on a floured surface for 10 min., or in a mixer for 5 min. Cover the bowl and let the dough rise until doubled, about 1½ hours.

**Assembling the pizza**—Heat the oven to 450°. If you're using a baking stone, let it heat in the oven for 30 min. Combine the garlic and olive oil.

Divide the dough in half. Roll out one piece of dough into a 12-in. round. If you're using a baking stone, roll out the dough on a pizza peel or on kitchen parchment. Otherwise, roll it on a lightly floured surface and transfer it to an oiled baking sheet. Brush 1 to 2 Tbs. of garlic oil on the dough. Arrange half the mozzarella around the pizza, and lay 4 slices of prosciutto on top. Bake until dark brown and crispy, 10 to 12 min. Repeat with the second piece of dough.

Meanwhile, toss all the salad ingredients together. When the pizzas are done, top each one with half the salad and serve.

*(Continued)*

*Sharp and peppery arugula salad tops a pizza baked with mild mozzarella cheese and salty prosciutto.*







*Pasta makes its own sauce. Toss fresh arugula, sweet tomato wedges, and sharp ricotta salata with hot spaghetti for a quick summer dinner.*

### **SPAGHETTI WITH ARUGULA, TOMATO & RICOTTA SALATA**

The sharp sheep's milk flavor of *ricotta salata* is unbeatable with arugula. If you can't find this dried cheese at an Italian market or at a cheese shop, use a smaller amount of mozzarella or Parmesan instead (the soft ricotta that comes in a tub won't work). Whichever cheese you use, grate it slowly on a grater with large holes to get long strands of cheese. Serves four to six.

**1 lb. dry spaghetti**  
**½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**2 tsp. dried oregano**  
**3 beefsteak tomatoes, cut into 8 to 10 wedges each**  
**6 oz. arugula (about 7 cups, loosely packed), washed, tough stems removed**  
**5 oz. grated ricotta salata**

Cook the spaghetti in plenty of salted boiling water until *al dente*. Drain well, but don't rinse. While it's still hot, put the pasta in a large bowl and toss it with the oil, salt, pepper, oregano, and tomatoes. Gently toss in the arugula. Divide among bowls, top with the grated *ricotta salata* and serve immediately.

### **TAGLIATA CON RUCOLA**

*(Sliced steak with arugula)*

To capture all the great juices from the beef that mingle with the lemon juice and arugula, you want to serve this dish in the same pan it's cooked in. The trickiest part is finding a plate or pan that can go on a hot grill or stovetop and yet is attractive to serve in. At the restaurant, we use our regular, thick plates, but a couple of times a year we'll lose one as it cracks over the heat. Fajita pans and enameled cast-iron gratin pans work well. It's best to cook each serving separately, but if you have to double up, make sure you don't crowd the meat in the pan. Serve with bread to sop up the juices in the pan. Serves two.

**2 strip or top sirloin steaks, 6 oz. each, completely trimmed of any fat or sinew**  
**1½ tsp. kosher salt**  
**1 Tbs. coarsely cracked black pepper**  
**¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**4 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary**  
**3 oz. arugula (about 3½ cups, loosely packed), washed, tough stems removed**  
**½ lemon cut in wedges**

Season the beef with a little bit of the salt and pepper. Sear the steaks briefly on a hot grill or in a heavy pan to brown the outside. Remove from the grill (the center will still be raw). When cool enough to handle, slice the steaks on an angle into ½-in. slices. Fan them so they're almost flat on individual heatproof platters (see note above). Drizzle with the olive oil and sprinkle on the rosemary and the rest of the salt and pepper. Put the platters on the grill or on a burner and heat until the oil begins to bubble and the meat is cooked halfway through, about 5 min. The top will still look rare. Remove from the grill and surround each steak with the arugula. Squeeze the lemon on the arugula to taste (if you put the juice on the meat, it will turn the beef gray.) Serve immediately.

*Tony Mantuano is the chef at Tuttaposto in Chicago, which he and his wife Cathy own, along with Mangia Trattoria in Kenosha, Wisconsin. ♦*



# Potato Pancakes, and More

Root vegetables and legumes make delicious savory cakes

BY CLEM NILAN

When my mother made potato pancakes to use up leftovers, my family was ecstatic to see her set a platter of these golden-brown beauties and a bottle of ketchup in front of us. Now that I cook for myself, I forgo the ketchup—but I still love all kinds of savory cakes.

A savory cake is a mixture of root vegetables or legumes that is loosely bound, formed into a small, flat cake, and sautéed. While I offer several recipes for savory cakes, you can probably create your own after a trip to the market or even a scavenger hunt through the refrigerator. Leftovers like cooked beans, lentils, and baked or boiled potatoes can easily be turned into a delicious side dish or a light supper.

## SEASONING THE SAVORY CAKE

The key to good savory cakes lies in the seasoning. The choice of herbs and spices is a free-for-all (fresh herbs really shine), but adding aromatic vegetables such as onions and garlic is a must because they give depth and character to the bland, starchy ingredients that compose savory cakes. While these essential ingredients can be added raw for extra crunch and bite, sautéing releases and tempers their flavors. Other cooked ingredients, such as sautéed diced vegetables, chopped bacon, or toasted pine nuts, can also be used.

To further embellish your savory cakes, there are a number of condiments you might consider. Apple sauce or a sweet-tart chutney are classic matches for potato pancakes; salsa would be perfect for a black-bean cake made with coriander, cumin, and chiles; and herbed sour cream would go well with almost any savory cake imaginable.

## GRATED VS. MASHED

My favorite savory cake ingredient is grated raw potatoes. Always grate raw vegetables—especially potatoes—immediately before cooking to avoid discoloration. When air reaches the grated surface of a raw vegetable, the vegetable discolors quickly.



Cooked root vegetables, beans, and legumes are also good in savory cakes, but are best mashed to a creamy-chunky consistency. Mashing releases starch and makes the cakes tender enough to cut with a fork. It's also important, however, to include chopped ingredients for contrasting texture.

Starch is the binding element that separates savory cakes from a side dish of plain vegetables or beans. Potatoes and beans have plenty of natural starch, but other root vegetables aren't as starchy. If your cakes don't seem to hold together, try adding a tablespoon of flour or cornstarch for every two cups of vegetables.

Raw potatoes contain starch but also a lot of water; you want to keep one but not the other. To get rid of excess liquid, grate the potatoes into a

*Savory sweet-potato cake makes the meal. Great as an appetizer, with a few side dishes, it can also be a vegetarian main course.*

**Grated potatoes provide their own starch.** Squeeze the excess liquid from the grated potatoes and let it sit until the starch separates from the liquid. Throw out the liquid, but not the starch; add it back into the potatoes for binder.



colander that's set inside a large bowl. Push down on the potatoes to squeeze out excess liquid. After a few minutes, the liquid in the bowl will separate, and a starchy sediment will settle at the bottom. Carefully pour off the liquid and incorporate the starch back into the potatoes.

Sometimes starch alone isn't enough to hold cakes together, and that's where eggs come in. These act as a form of culinary glue, with the white as the binding element. The high-fat yolk supplies richness and flavor, but you can omit it with no loss of binding capability.

### COOKING CAKES

Savory cakes are most easily handled when shaped into round patties about three inches in diameter and half an inch thick. These are sturdy enough to turn without difficulty and thin enough to allow the outside to brown and the inside to warm in the same amount of time.

Oil-generous frying is the traditional—and the best—method for cooking savory cakes. Potato

**Shaping savory cakes is child's play.** Here, roasted sweet potatoes are mixed with corn, red peppers, and fresh herbs. The mashed potato contains plenty of starch, so there's no need to add eggs or flour to hold the ingredients together.





pancakes fried in a quarter inch of hot oil are a fulfilling treat, but for less indulgent occasions I find that cooking savory cakes with just enough oil to thoroughly cover the pan's surface is a good compromise. Use a heavy pan (it gives better heat distribution) that has a level and unblemished surface; an uneven or rough surface encourages sticking. I don't advise cooking savory cakes in a dry, nonstick pan because the cakes tend to burn. No matter how you cook your cakes, serve them quickly. They can be held in a warm oven up to 30 minutes after cooking, but they're best served immediately.

### POTATO CAKES

Other root vegetables, such as celery root, parsnips, or carrots, may replace up to a third of the potatoes in this recipe. *Yields about a dozen 3-inch cakes.*

**1½ lb. red potatoes, scrubbed and grated**  
**1 medium onion, grated**  
**1 tsp. salt**  
**½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**  
**Vegetable oil**

Put the grated potatoes in a colander that's set inside a bowl. Press on the potatoes to squeeze out the excess water. Let the liquid stand for a few minutes; the starch will settle at the bottom of the bowl. Pour off the liquid and add the grated potatoes to the potato starch. Add the onion, salt, and pepper, and mix well.

Heat ¼ in. of oil in a sauté pan until the oil is very hot and then reduce the heat to medium high. Scoop out ⅓ cup (packed) batter, press it firmly with your hands to form a cake, and carefully slip it in the oil. Don't crowd the pan or the temperature will drop and the cakes will absorb the fat. Fry until golden brown, about 2 to 3 min. on each side, turning once.

### ITALIAN WHITE-BEAN CAKES

These cakes make a wonderful accompaniment to grilled meat or fish. *Yields six to eight 3-inch cakes.*

**8 oz. dried cannellini beans, soaked overnight and drained**  
**1 Tbs. olive oil**  
**½ medium onion, diced**  
**1 clove garlic, minced**  
**2 Tbs. minced parsley**  
**¾ tsp. minced fresh sage (or a pinch dried)**  
**¾ tsp. salt**  
**¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**  
**¼ cup flour**  
**3 Tbs. vegetable oil**

Cook the beans in 4 cups water until tender, about an hour. Remove 1 cup of beans from the pot, chop them coarse, and set aside. Continue cooking the remaining beans until they're very soft. Drain and purée the soft beans; set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Sauté the onion and garlic until translucent. Add the parsley, sage, salt, and pepper. Mix this with the puréed and chopped beans; taste for seasoning. Chill the mixture at least 1 hour.



Put the flour in a shallow pie pan. Flour your hands well. With a ⅓-cup measure, scoop out the bean mixture and, with your hands, shape a 3-in. cake about ½ in. thick. Set the bean cake in the pie pan and dust thoroughly with flour, tapping off excess. Set aside until all the cakes are shaped.

Heat the vegetable oil in a heavy, nonstick pan over medium-high heat and add the cakes without crowding the pan. Cook for about 4 min. and then turn and continue cooking for another 5 min., or until golden brown.

### SWEET-POTATO CAKES

This recipe varies from the basic potato pancake by using sweet potatoes that have been mashed for a creamier texture. *Yields six 3-inch cakes.*

**2 lb. sweet potatoes, roasted, flesh scooped out**  
**⅓ cup diced red bell pepper**  
**⅓ cup fresh, frozen, or well-drained canned corn kernels**  
**2 Tbs. minced parsley**  
**¼ cup minced chives**  
**1 tsp. salt**  
**½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**  
**Vegetable oil**

Cook the sweet potato flesh in a saucepan over medium heat, stirring, for 2 to 3 min. to reduce moisture. The potatoes still will feel somewhat tacky.

In a bowl, combine the potatoes with the red pepper, corn, parsley, chives, salt, and pepper. Taste and adjust the seasonings. With your hands, shape the mixture into 3-in. cakes about ½ in. thick.

Heat ¼ in. of oil in a sauté pan until the oil is very hot and then reduce the heat to medium high. Slip in the cakes but don't crowd the pan, or the temperature will drop and the cakes will absorb the fat. Cook until golden brown, 1 to 1½ min. on each side.

*Frying potato pancakes means incomparable flavor. The hot oil adds a crunch that's worth the extra calories.*

*For ten years, Clem Nilan owned and operated The Daily Planet, a restaurant in Burlington, Vermont. He is now an instructor at the New England Culinary Institute in Essex, Vermont. ♦*

# Cool Cucumbers, Served Hot

Enjoy one of the most common vegetables at its uncommon best

BY ERICA DE MANE







**Cucumbers go well with all types of seafood.** Freshly squeezed lemon juice in the warm shrimp salad above creates an acidic counterpoint to the clean taste of the cucumbers.

**Roasting intensifies the flavor of almost any vegetable, including cucumbers,** making them a perfect choice for gratins. I like to layer cucumbers with fresh fennel and a generous sprinkling of Parmesan cheese, as shown at left.

**M**y first taste of warm cucumbers was a revelation. Their firm, toothsome texture was similar to a sautéed mushroom, while the clean, juicy flavor reminded me of a ripe melon, only not as sweet. As I began to experiment with cooking cucumbers in my own kitchen, I was delighted to discover how well they marry with the Italian ingredients I love. Like melon, cucumbers are a natural partner to prosciutto. Tomatoes, garlic, and vinegar all underscore a cucumber's delicate acidity. I like them, too, with fresh herbs, such as basil, parsley, and fennel sprigs. When cooked, cucumbers retain their freshness and add an acidic counterpoint to meals. They're perfect alongside light dishes, but because of their natural acidity, they provide a nice balance to rich meats as well, like roast duck or calf's liver.

**It occurs to me that Americans treat vegetables with almost too much respect.** Admonished since childhood to eat vegetables because they

will make us strong and improve our eyesight (no one ever mentions that vegetables simply taste good), we approach them like some kind of cultivated vitamin pill. Having been told that vegetables are most nutritious in their natural state, we hesitate to cook them too long, if at all. Sometimes we don't even peel them. So if undercooked vegetables are tasteless, and the skins are tough and often bitter, no one dares complain. Vegetables are good for you, we say, they're not *supposed* to taste good.

The French, on the other hand, never hesitate to peel, soak, salt, squeeze, blanch, or boil their vegetables. They'll do whatever is needed to bring out the best flavor and texture. Take cucumbers as a case in point. Americans eat them raw with their skins and seeds intact and then complain that cucumbers are bitter and difficult to digest. But in France, they peel cucumbers, strip out the seeds, sprinkle them with salt and vinegar to leach out the



*Scoop out all the seeds in one clean stroke. To prepare a cucumber, peel it, trim the ends, halve it, and scrape out the seeds where the bitter juices tend to collect. The author uses a vegetable peeler to get rid of the skin, and then turns it upside down and uses the handle to remove the seeds.*



*Add flavor and remove water all at once. Toss sliced cucumbers with salt, vinegar, and a bit of sugar to draw out excess water that can dilute their flavor. Cucumbers treated this way will stay firm when cooked, while the marinade adds its own delicious touch of tartness.*

moisture, rinse them, and then cook them and season them well. The result is a delicious and delicate-flavored vegetable almost unknown to Americans.

### HEAT ENHANCES A CUCUMBER'S NATURAL SWEETNESS

Saut $\acute{e}$ ing is perhaps the best technique for cooking cucumbers. It brings out their natural sweetness, and because the cucumbers cook quickly, they retain some of their original texture. Many cookbooks suggest blanching cucumbers before saut $\acute{e}$ ing, but I find this unnecessary—it only leaches out flavor. In fact, boiling is never a good way to cook cucumbers, and neither is slow stewing, which does nothing but diminish their flavor. Roasting, however, locks in taste, as it does with many vegetables, so cucumbers make wonderful gratins. When seeded, they have a boat shape that makes them perfect for stuffing. *Larousse Gastronomique*, the encyclopedia of classic French cooking, suggests stuffing cucumbers with duxelles (saut $\acute{e}$ ed diced mushrooms), wrapping them in bacon, and baking them in a slow oven.

Cucumbers' high water content does pose a problem when cooking with them. If the excess water isn't leached out beforehand, it can dilute a cucumber's subtle flavor. I usually follow Julia Child's advice of marinating seeded, raw cucumbers in salt, vinegar, and a bit of sugar before cooking. Not only does it rid cucumbers of excess water, but the marinade also adds a delicious bit of tartness to their flavor.

### WHAT'S THE BEST VARIETY FOR COOKING?

The most common cucumber in this country is a thick-skinned, rather short variety with a watery inner core of seeds. I think its flavor holds up better than other varieties when cooked. Look for dark green ones with none of the yellow streaks that indicate aging. Choose firm, smallish cucumbers; the larger ones can be tough. In the supermarket, these cucumbers are usually waxed, a grower's trick to retain humidity and lengthen shelf life. The wax is

nontoxic, of course, but it can cause pesticides to cling to the vegetable's surface, so I remove the skin or scrub it vigorously before eating. European hot-house cucumbers, sometimes more than a foot long, are also available in many grocery stores. Hothouse cucumbers are almost seedless and have thin, light green skins. Grown here, they don't have that slight trace of bitterness found in the more common varieties, but because their flavor is so mild, it tends to fade when cooked. Stubby Kirby cucumbers taste a little like watermelon rind to me. You can use them for cooking, but once you remove all the seeds, there isn't much left. Kirbys are best reserved for pickling.

Store cucumbers in a cool, moist environment of 40° to 50°F. Refrigerate them in plastic bags and they'll stay fresh for about a week, depending on how old they were when purchased. Bitterness tends to collect in the ends and in the seeds, so be sure to trim a half inch at either end and scrape out the seeds. Salting only pulls out excess water; it doesn't make cucumbers less bitter.

### CUCUMBER & FENNEL GRATIN

Blanching the fennel before baking makes it more tender and toothsome in the finished dish. *Serves four.*

*2 medium cucumbers, peeled, seeded, and sliced thin*

*Salt*

*Juice from ½ lemon*

*1 large fennel bulb, cored, sliced thin, and blanched for 2 min. in abundant, lightly salted water*

*3 Tbs. butter, melted*

*Freshly ground black pepper*

*½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese*

Toss the cucumbers with about ½ tsp. salt and the lemon juice and let drain in a colander about 30 min. Rinse and pat dry.

Heat the oven to 350°F. In a shallow baking dish, combine the cucumber and fennel slices. Pour in the melted butter and season with salt and pepper. Toss well.

Bake uncovered, tossing occasionally, until the vegetables are tender, about 30 min. Sprinkle with the grated Parmesan. Return to the oven and bake until the cheese is melted and just starting to brown, about 5 min. longer. Serve immediately.



### WARM CUCUMBER & SHRIMP SALAD

Boldly flavored with capers, garlic, and basil, this salad makes a refreshing main dish. Serve it in smaller portions for a first course. *Serves four.*

#### FOR THE DRESSING:

1 tsp. fresh lemon juice  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

#### FOR THE SALAD:

1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded, and sliced thin  
1 Tbs. mild white-wine vinegar, such as champagne or rice  
1 tsp. sugar  
Salt  
1 Tbs. olive oil  
4 thin slices pancetta (unsmoked Italian bacon), chopped fine  
1 lb. medium shrimp, peeled and deveined, tails intact  
1 clove garlic, minced  
½ cup chopped fresh basil  
1 Tbs. Italian capers, rinsed  
Pinch cayenne  
Juice of ½ large lemon  
Freshly ground black pepper  
1 bunch arugula (about 4 cups, loosely packed)

**For the dressing**—Combine the lemon juice, salt, and pepper and whisk until the salt dissolves. Add the olive oil and whisk until well combined.

**For the salad**—In a small bowl, toss the cucumber slices with the vinegar, sugar, and about ½ tsp. salt. Let stand at least 30 min. Drain and pat dry.

In a large frying pan, heat the olive oil over medium-low

heat. Add the pancetta and cook until it has rendered its fat and has just started to brown, 8 to 10 min. Increase the heat to medium, add the shrimp and garlic, and cook briefly, just until the shrimp starts to turn pink, about 1 min. Add the cucumber and sauté until the shrimp is cooked through, about 1 min. longer. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the basil, capers, cayenne, and lemon juice. Taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper as needed.

Toss the arugula with the dressing and arrange on a serving platter. Spoon the shrimp and cucumbers on top. Serve immediately.

### SWORDFISH WITH CUCUMBER & RED PEPPER A SCAPECE

The cucumber *a scapece* (pronounced ah SKE-pah-CHAY) can be served with other fish besides swordfish, and it makes a refreshing sauce for grilled chicken or pork, too. *Serves four.*

#### FOR THE CUCUMBER A SCAPECE:

1 medium cucumber, peeled, seeded, and diced  
Salt  
2 Tbs. olive oil  
1 small onion, diced  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1 large red bell pepper, roasted, peeled, seeded, and diced  
Pinch cayenne  
Pinch cinnamon  
1 tsp. sugar  
1 Tbs. white-wine vinegar  
5 sprigs fresh mint, leaves chopped; more whole sprigs for decoration

(Ingredient list continues)

A favorite Italian method of preserving vegetables, called a *scapece*, combines cucumbers with sugar, vinegar, and fresh mint. The result is wonderfully tart and just a bit sweet, without tasting excessively "pickled"—the perfect complement to swordfish steaks.





#### FOR THE FISH:

**2 Tbs. unsalted butter**

**4 swordfish steaks, about 4 oz. each**

**Salt**

Toss the cucumber slices with about  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt and let drain in a colander at least 20 min.

In a large frying pan, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Toss in the onion and cook until just starting to brown, about 10 min. Add the garlic and cook about 1 min. longer. Stir in the cucumber slices and cook to release their perfume, about 3 min. Stir in the roasted red pepper, the cayenne, cinnamon, sugar, vinegar, and salt to taste. Cook until the liquid has evaporated and the sugar begins to caramelize, 3 to 5 min. Add the chopped mint leaves. Transfer to a bowl.

In the same frying pan, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Sprinkle the swordfish steaks with salt and put them in the pan. Cook until browned, about 5 min. Turn the fish over and continue cooking until done, about 3 min. longer. If there's excess oil in the pan, drain some of it off.

Return the cucumber sauce to the pan to heat it through and to absorb the swordfish cooking juices. Spoon the cucumber *scapece* over the swordfish steaks and decorate with fresh mint leaves, if you like. Serve immediately.

#### SAUTÉED CUCUMBERS WITH PROSCIUTTO & CREAM

Serve these delectable cucumbers as a side dish with chops or roasted meats. Serves four.

**3 medium cucumbers, peeled, seeded, and cut in medium slices**

**1 tsp. white-wine vinegar**

**$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. sugar**

**Salt**

**2 Tbs. unsalted butter**

**2 thin slices prosciutto, cut into thin strips**

**$\frac{1}{2}$  cup heavy cream (preferably not ultrapasteurized)**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**$4\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. chopped flat-leaf parsley**

In a small bowl, toss the cucumbers with the vinegar, sugar, and a bit of salt. Let sit about 30 min. Drain well and pat dry.

In a large sauté pan, melt the butter over medium heat. When frothing, add the cucumbers and toss well. Sauté until the cucumbers are tender and begin to color slightly, 5 to 10 min. Add the prosciutto and the cream and heat through. Let the cream bubble for a minute to thicken slightly. Taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper. Toss with the parsley and serve immediately.

*Erica De Mane is a chef, food writer, and cooking teacher who specializes in southern Italian cooking. She lives in New York City. ♦*

*Cream and prosciutto make a lean vegetable rich and savory.*

*You can leave out the prosciutto and cream, if you like, and add just a squirt of lemon juice for a simpler dish. Another good variation is substituting sliced wild mushrooms for the prosciutto, with or without the cream.*



# Homemade Cream Cheese

Tastes so much better than store-bought, and it's easy to make

BY PAULA LAMBERT

**C**ream cheese is essential to the morning bagel ritual, and it fuels the passions of cheesecake lovers. But most people don't know that these favorite foods taste even better with homemade cream cheese. To my taste, supermarket cream cheese is rather bland and slippery; it's also firmed with gelatin, steered with stabilizers, and comes in an ugly, foil-wrapped rectangle. Homemade cream cheese has a rich, fresh-cream flavor and a refreshing tanginess, and it's made with just one main ingredient: whole milk. Despite its taste and its name, homemade cream cheese contains no added cream.

At my cheese factory, The Mozzarella Company, I make more than 20 kinds of cheese. Yet despite—or perhaps due to—its simplicity, cream cheese remains one of my favorite products. While I make 50 pounds of cream cheese every week, you can make a couple of pounds at home in very little time and with no special equipment.

## CREAM CHEESE IS MILK WITH CULTURE

Milk needs two natural additives to become cream cheese: mesophilic culture, which is a bacteria that causes the milk to produce lactic acid; and vegetable rennet, which coagulates the acidic milk. Check the phone book for cheesemaking supply stores in your area, or see the mail-order sources on p. 43.

It takes two days to create a batch of cream cheese, but there's only a couple of hours of actual attention (mostly stirring the milk occasionally). Although there's nothing difficult about making cream cheese, it's important to follow the directions carefully. Even if you do everything correctly, cream cheese can be a capricious product. A quart of vitamin D milk may taste the same in California as it does in Florida, but the type of cows it came from and what they were fed can be very different, and these factors can affect cheesemaking. The most common side effect of these variations is that the



milk may fail to curd quickly. If you find this is a problem, try doubling the amount of rennet.

You can control two other important factors in cheesemaking—heat and cleanliness. Not only will accurate temperatures and clean equipment ensure your cheesemaking is a sanitary procedure, they're key to creating a successful batch. Use a thermometer, not guesswork; as few as 10 degrees over or under can make a difference.

## FROM MILK TO CURD

Cream cheese begins when you heat milk, stirring often, in a stainless-steel or enamel-coated stockpot (see recipe on p. 42). Watch the heat carefully; milk scorches easily. When the milk reaches 165°F, immediately plunge the pot into a sink filled with

*Testing the curds and whey. When the milk has properly curdled, the whey will rise to the top and the curd will be slightly resilient to the touch, like yogurt. It may take 24 hours or longer for this to happen, so be patient. Milks and cultures can vary, so curdling time varies, too.*

## FRESH CREAM CHEESE

Yields 1½ to 2 pounds.

1 gallon whole  
homogenized milk  
1 envelope mesophilic  
culture  
4 drops vegetable  
rennet  
½ cup cold water  
Salt to taste

*Don't break the curd. Be gentle when transferring the curd to a fabric-lined colander to drain. You want the curd to remain as unbroken as possible; this will give you firmer, more flavorful cream cheese.*

ice or very cold water. Stir the milk occasionally until it cools to 90°; this should take 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer the milk to a bowl.

Now it's time to inoculate the milk. Add one envelope of mesophilic culture. The package directions will say that the envelope cultures two gallons of milk; although my recipe calls for one gallon of milk, use the whole envelope anyway. Stir well for one minute. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and drape a towel over it. Allow the milk to sit undisturbed for 45 minutes to an hour at room temperature.

Dilute the vegetable rennet in half a cup of cold water and stir well. Add this mixture to the inoculated milk. Using a figure-8 pattern, stir the milk constantly for two minutes. The rennet is quite concentrated, so the dilution and stirring are very important to ensure the rennet is evenly distributed in the milk. Cover the container with plastic again and leave the milk in a warm spot (about 70°F), undisturbed, until the whey (a thin, yellowish liquid) rises and a curd forms (see photo on p. 41); this could take anywhere from 18 to 28 hours. When the milk is properly curdled, the curd will resemble white gelatin or yogurt and will be firm enough to hold its shape on a spoon. If this doesn't happen in the given time range, the milk has not coagulated enough. The room temperature may be too cool, or the cultures could be slow in acid development. In any case, don't worry: just wait a few more hours and try again.

### FROM CURD TO CHEESE

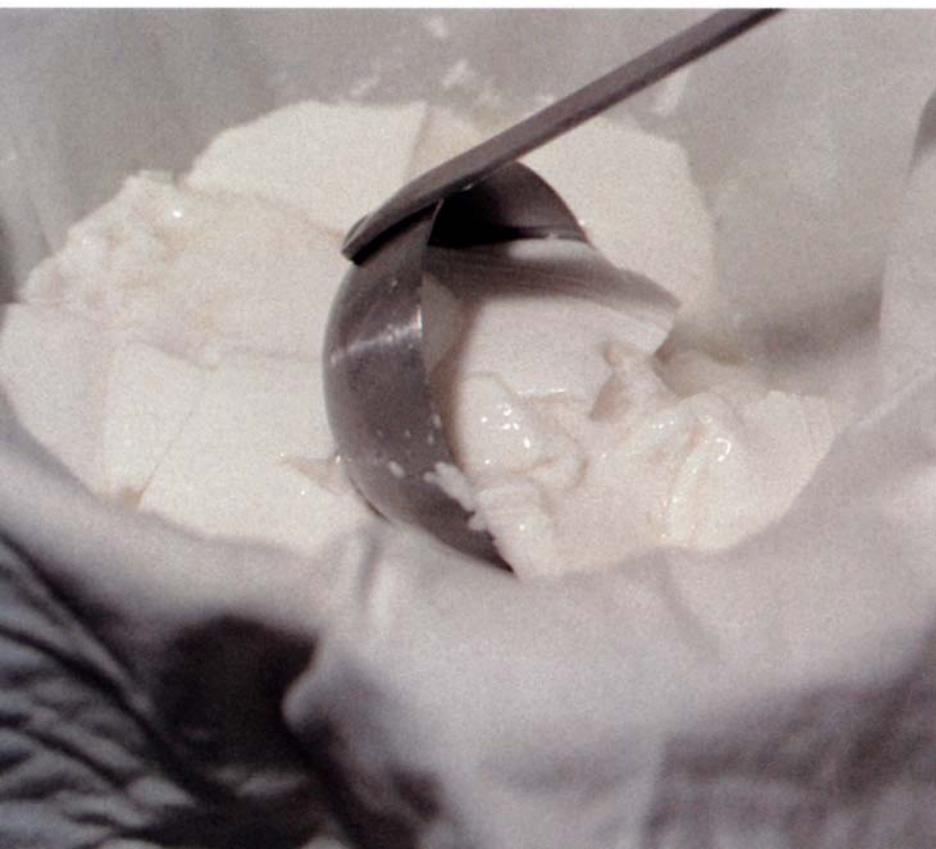
Once the curd has coagulated properly, use a ladle or a small bowl to carefully scoop the curd mass



into a colander lined with a double thickness of cheesecloth, a cotton pillowcase, or a linen towel (see photo at left.) Make sure the colander is over the sink to catch all the whey that will drain from the curd. If you want to save the high-protein whey for cooking or baking, set the colander over a large bowl. When transferring the curd, be careful to break it up as little as possible. If you shatter the curd, it will expel more whey, which makes for a drier and less flavorful cheese. Once all the curd is in the colander, fold the excess fabric over the curd, and set the colander in a large bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it in the refrigerator for 24 hours. The cheese will continue to drain as it chills.

When you remove the cheese from the refrigerator, it's finished. Just turn the cheese into a clean bowl, stir it with a spoon, and add one or two teaspoons of salt, or more to taste. Remember, this won't look like store-bought cheese; it will be soft and appear a little curdled (see photo above). The cheese smoothes easily with a little stirring.

You now have two pounds of homemade, ready-to-use cream cheese. While all the garden-variety uses for cream cheese will be better than ever (it's so good on bagels that you won't even want lox), try using your batch in cheesecakes, fruit tarts, vegetable dips, or in the following recipe for a three-layer *torta*. All these dishes put cream cheese in the spotlight—and when it's homemade, that's just where it ought to be.







*Don't worry: home-made cream cheese should look a little curdled. After all the whey has drained away, your finished cheese will appear a little lumpy and feel soft to the touch. To make the cheese smooth, just give it a good stir.*



Photo: Todd Bryant

## CREAM CHEESE TORTA

This *torta* is ideal for parties. If you're planning an intimate gathering, the recipe is easily reduced to suit smaller molds. Yields 4 to 5 cups, enough for a 1-quart mold; serves 20 or more as an appetizer.

**2 lb. fresh cream cheese**

**8-oz. jar sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained**

**¼ cup basil pesto (see recipe at right)**

**8 to 10 very thin slices low-moisture mozzarella, provolone, Swiss, or Monterey Jack cheese**  
**Toasted pine nuts (optional)**

Divide the cream cheese into three equal parts and put them in separate bowls.

Put the sun-dried tomatoes in the work bowl of a food processor and process until smooth.

Stir the basil pesto into one part of the cream cheese until it's well mixed and the desired flavor is achieved. Into another part, stir about 2 Tbs. sun-dried tomato purée, or more to taste. (Any remaining purée can be put in a container, covered in oil, and refrigerated indefinitely.) Leave one part of the cream cheese plain.

Line a small mixing bowl or a terrine mold (4- to 5-cup capacity) with plastic wrap, leaving the excess wrap hanging over the edges. If you like, create a decorative pattern with the toasted pine nuts on the bottom of the lined bowl or mold. (You could also garnish the *torta* after it has been assembled.)

Spoon half of the tomato-flavored cream cheese into the bowl. Cover the cream cheese with a layer of the sliced cheese and press down gently to make it even and smooth. Then spoon half of the pesto-flavored cream cheese into the bowl. Add another layer of sliced cheese and press down gently. Follow that with half of the plain cream cheese. Add a final layer of sliced cheese and again press down gently. Repeat the layering process.

Fold the excess plastic wrap over the top of the *torta* and press down gently. Refrigerate for several hours, preferably overnight.

To unmold, open the plastic wrap, lay a serving plate over the bowl or mold, and invert. Carefully peel away the plastic wrap and decorate the *torta* with toasted pine nuts, if you like. Serve it with melba toast or water crackers.

## BASIL PESTO:

Yields ¾ cup.

**2 cups fresh basil leaves, lightly packed**

**½ cup walnuts**

**¼ cup olive oil**

**1 tsp. salt**

**1 clove garlic**

Put all the ingredients in the work bowl of a food processor and process until the mixture has a fairly smooth consistency, about 1 min.

## SOURCES FOR RENNET & MESOPHILIC CULTURE

**The New England Cheesemaking Supply Company,**  
 85-194 Main St., Ashfield, MA 01330-0085; 413/628-

3808. Carries vegetable rennet and mesophilic culture.

**Lehman's Hardware,** PO Box 41, Kidron, OH 44636;  
 216/857-5757. Carries vegetable rennet and mesophilic culture.

**Caprine Supply Co.,** PO Box Y, De Soto, KS 66018;  
 913/585-1191. Carries mesophilic culture.

*Paula Lambert is the founder and owner of The Mozzarella Company in Dallas, where she makes a large line of award-winning cheeses. ♦*

*This three-layer cream cheese torta is always a hit on hors d'oeuvre platters. Alternating layers of plain, pesto, and sun-dried-tomato cream cheese are separated by thin slices of provolone or mozzarella. The flavors are at their peak if you make the torta just 24 hours ahead.*



# Salad and Wine— Delicious Partners

A tricky food-  
and-wine pairing  
is easy when  
you link the  
key flavors

BY JOHN ASH

Certain dishes seem to go naturally with wine: grilled lamb chops with a big Cabernet; briny oysters with bone-dry Chablis; sweet ripe pears with Sauternes; Caesar salad with...well, it's not so easy with salad. There are few classic salad-and-wine partners, because traditionally salad has been considered "unfriendly" to wine. Acidic dressings and raw greens and vegetables don't flatter wine, so why bother? Conventional wisdom said to just skip wine for the salad course, or sip a glass of sparkling water.

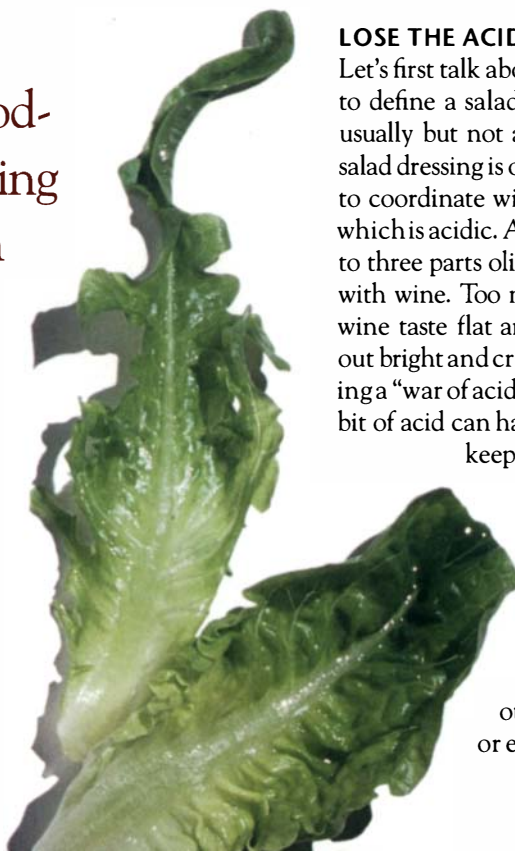
But there's no reason to deprive yourself of a great glass of wine with a great salad. Today's salads are main events, full of fabulous flavors and intriguing textures. When built with the right ingredients, a salad can be the perfect partner for a full range of wines, from crisp Sauvignon Blanc to buttery Chardonnay to earthy Côtes du Rhône. Even off-dry Rieslings and Gewürztraminers can match salads that have sweet notes.

As with any food-and-wine matching, it's crucial to think about the relative weight and body of each half of the partnership. You don't want a rich, oaky wine to accompany a crisp, light cucumber and watercress salad. Nor would a crisp and grassy Sauvignon Blanc necessarily be right for a salad loaded with grilled shiitakes, duck breast, and walnut oil. For me, the two keys to good salad-and-wine matches are making sure that there isn't too much acid in the dressing and that the salad contains lots of "bridge" ingredients—ingredients whose flavors are found in both the salad and the wine, or whose flavors and textures complement and contrast with (and in some cases mitigate) the wine.

## LOSE THE ACID BUT NOT THE ZING

Let's first talk about what a salad is. The simplest way to define a salad is dressing and lots of other stuff, usually but not always including some greens. The salad dressing is one of the most difficult components to coordinate with wine because of its very nature, which is acidic. A straight "one part red-wine vinegar to three parts olive oil" dressing is too sharp to work with wine. Too much aggressive acid will make the wine taste flat and dull, even when the wine starts out bright and crisp. The best advice is to avoid starting a "war of acids" between the two partners. A little bit of acid can harmonize beautifully with wine; just keep acids in balance.

The easiest thing to do is to just cut down on the amount of vinegar in the recipe, but you don't want to leave your dressing without enough zing to taste good. Try using a more mellow vinegar, such as balsamic or rice wine, or look to other tart ingredients like fruit juice or even wine instead of vinegar.





## Add ingredients to make salads wine-friendly

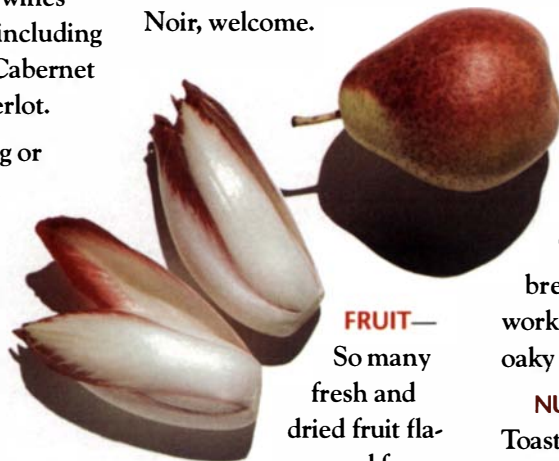
When designing a salad, be sure to include ingredients that have a natural affinity to wine. They'll create the link that makes the combination work.

**HERBS**—Lots of wines have herbal notes, including Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot.

**GREENS**—Strong or peppery greens will want a wine with some spiciness to it, like Zinfandel or Petite Sirah.

**VEGETABLES**—Roasting vegetables concentrates their flavors and brings out their natural sweetness. Vegetables in this mellow state work well with deeper, richer wines like Zinfandel and barrel-aged Sauvignon Blanc. Grilled vegetables want a wine that's "seen

some oak" to link the toasty, woody flavors, so try a barrel-fermented Chardonnay. Mushrooms in particular make a salad more full bodied and earthy, making a red wine, such as Pinot Noir, welcome.



### FRUIT—

So many fresh and dried fruit flavors and fragrances are found in wine that fruit is a natural bridge ingredient. Apple, pear, melon, and even tropical fruit flavors are common in Riesling, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Sauvignon

Blanc, or Sémillon. Ripe fresh berries and cherries dominate many Beaujolais and Pinot Noirs, and even hearty Cabernets can have similar flavors. Dried fruit, like figs, dried cranberries, apricots, and raisins will link to wines with bright fruit notes, such as Grenache or Gamay.

### CROUTONS—

Toasted or grilled bread in a salad also works nicely with slightly oaky wines.

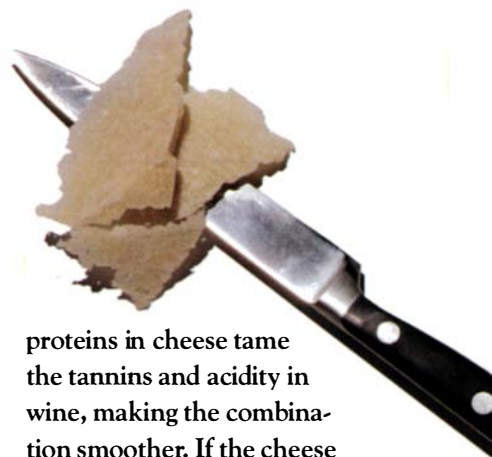
### NUTS—

Toasted nuts complement slightly oaky, toasty wines.



### CHEESE—

Wine and cheese is almost a cliché, but why does it work so well? One reason is that the milk



proteins in cheese tame the tannins and acidity in wine, making the combination smoother. If the cheese is very salty, like a blue cheese, pair it with a slightly sweet wine, such as an off-dry Riesling. Dry aged cheeses like Parmesan or Asiago, with their toasty, buttery flavors, link wonderfully to barrel-fermented and -aged Chardonnays.

### MEAT, SEAFOOD,

### POULTRY—

These ingredients can tame tannins and acids in the same way cheese does, and their fuller flavors and textures make a salad bolder and more substantial. Think of grilling these ingredients and going for an oakier wine.

Also think about alternatives for the oil used in traditional dressings. Try using some liquids that pack a lot of flavor, like a few tablespoons of rich stock. One of my favorite tricks for reducing fat and adding rich flavor is to reduce good unsalted chicken stock by one-half and substitute it for part or all of the oil in a dressing. When you do use oil, pay attention to the oil you choose. A super-fruity olive oil or a toasty note from a nut oil can make an important link with wine. (See sidebar on p. 46 for more dressing ideas.)

### GOING BEYOND LETTUCE AND TOMATO

Now let's look at the body of the salad to see where it can become more wine-welcoming. Pay attention to the flavors of the greens you choose. Most grocery stores today offer more than the old standby iceberg, romaine, and Bibb selection, and if you grow your own or have access to a good farmers' market, you know that there's a wide variety of greens to choose from with all kinds of flavors—peppery, spicy, nutty, tart. Keep these flavors in mind; too much of a good thing can overwhelm a subtle wine.

**Key ingredients link the salad and wine.** Earlier I mentioned building a salad using "bridge" ingredients, which have a number of functions in a good salad and wine match. They can echo flavors in the wine, such as fresh berries that pick up the ripe berry flavors of a Beaujolais, or a slice of sweet pear that's similar to the sweetness in an off-dry Chenin Blanc or Riesling.

Another type of bridge ingredient might contrast with—not echo—the wine. The heat of a serrano-chile-laced dressing will play nicely off a slightly sweet, spicy, lower-alcohol Gewürztraminer (the chile's heat tends to heighten the taste of alcohol in wine). Sometimes bridge ingredients can play down troublesome characteristics of the wine. For example, the tannins in a robust red wine would be too much for a simple salad of greens and vegetables, but some slices of rare grilled beef or a round of smoked mozzarella will make the tannins much milder and more agreeable. (See sidebar above for more information on bridge ingredients.) Most of all, remember that pairing salad and wine is not rocket science. Experiment and have fun with it.

## Dressings with more flavor, less acid

A major problem in pairing salad and wine is the high acid levels of most vinaigrettes, which wreaks havoc on wine, making it taste flat and flabby. You can avoid this conflict by making dressings that are less sharp but still vivid, with some of the following techniques:

- Replace part or all of the red- or white-wine vinegar in a recipe with balsamic, sherry, or rice-wine vinegar, which have fuller, mellower flavors.

- Use fruit juice instead of vinegar. Obvious choices might be lemon or lime juice, but think also of orange juice, apple cider, cranberry juice, or any fruit juice with a bright flavor.

- Replace acidic ingredients with other liquids that are intense but not sharp, such as rich chicken, veal, fish, or vegetable stock, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, juices from roasted meats or vegetables, or roasted-garlic purée.



### ORANGE, OLIVE & FENNEL SALAD WITH CRANBERRY VINAIGRETTE

This salad is full of rich colors and complex sweet and salty flavors. I would serve it with a fruity Beaujolais (or another gamay-based red wine) or an off-dry white wine. Serves six.

3 large peeled oranges, cut into ¼-in. slices  
1 large fennel bulb, trimmed, peeled, and cut vertically as thin as possible  
½ small red onion, sliced very thin  
½ cup mixed brine-cured olives, such as niçoise and kalamata

#### CRANBERRY VINAIGRETTE:

1½ cups cranberry juice  
¼ cup dried cranberries  
¼ cup olive oil  
2 Tbs. chopped shallot  
2 Tbs. fresh orange juice  
2 Tbs. red-wine vinegar, more to taste  
1 Tbs. chopped fresh dill  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

**For the dressing**—Combine the cranberry juice and dried cranberries in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Boil until the mixture is reduced to about ½ cup. Meanwhile, in a small sauté pan, heat about half the oil. Add the shallot and sauté until soft but not brown, about 5 min. Transfer to a bowl and reserve. Purée the reduced cranberry mixture in a blender or food processor. Add the

purée to the softened shallots and whisk in the remaining olive oil, the orange juice, vinegar, and dill. Season to taste with salt and pepper, adding more vinegar to the dressing if it's too sweet.

**To assemble the salad**—Divide the sliced oranges, fennel, and onion evenly among six salad plates. Scatter the olives around the plates and drizzle with the cranberry vinaigrette. Decorate with fennel sprigs or dill.



### HERB SALAD WITH ROASTED VEGETABLES & ROASTED-GARLIC VINAIGRETTE

This is more of a process than a real recipe. You can use any mix of herbs, greens, and vegetables that you like; the important thing is to roast the vegetables slowly and carefully to bring out all their natural sweetness. If the vegetables aren't small enough, just halve or quarter them so they all cook at about the same rate and so they look good together on the plate. Try it with a soft red like a Merlot or Pinot Noir or a barrel-aged Sauvignon Blanc. Serves six.

About 2 lb. assorted small vegetables—choose from new potatoes, carrots, beets, onions, Japanese eggplant, pattypan squash, asparagus

Extra-virgin olive oil

Fresh rosemary or thyme

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

About 4 cups mixed tender greens, edible flowers, and tender herbs—choose from parsley, chives, chervil, tarragon, dill, mint, basil, coriander

#### ROASTED-GARLIC VINAIGRETTE:

10 cloves garlic, in their skins  
3 Tbs. seasoned rice-wine vinegar  
Few drops fresh lemon juice  
1 tsp. grated lemon zest  
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 400°F. Toss all the vegetables (including the garlic for the dressing) separately, with enough oil to coat, and then season each generously with rosemary, thyme, salt, and pepper.

Put each type of vegetable on a separate sheet of foil and fold up to make a tight packet. Arrange the packets in a roasting pan (or two if necessary) and roast for 15 to 20 min., until the vegetables begin to feel tender when pierced with a knife or skewer. Carefully open the foil packets and continue roasting uncovered until completely tender and slightly caramelized. Try not to spill any juices that accumulate in the packets—you'll pour them onto the finished salad. Roasting times will vary for each vegetable depending on its density and size, so just keep testing.



**For the dressing**—Roast the garlic cloves following the directions above. When they're very tender, remove them from the oven, let cool until you can handle them, and then squeeze the roasted garlic pulp from the skins into a food processor. Add the vinegar, lemon juice, zest, and olive oil and pulse a few seconds to combine. The dressing may not be totally emulsified, but that's preferable to having one that's too thick. Season to taste with salt and pepper. You can make this dressing by hand, but it will separate more easily; just whisk vigorously before serving to re-emulsify.

**To assemble the salad**—Toss the herbs, greens, and flowers (if using) with a few spoonfuls of the dressing and arrange in a mound on each plate. Arrange the still-warm roasted vegetables around the salad and drizzle with a little more dressing. Serve warm.



### **GRILLED MUSHROOM SALAD WITH PARMESAN CHIPS & MUSTARD-SEED VINAIGRETTE**

Portobello mushrooms taste great in this salad, and their size and shape makes them easy to grill, but other "meaty" varieties, like shiitakes, porcinis, and oyster mushrooms, are all delicious. The heartiness of this salad asks for a mellow, rich red wine such as Merlot, or a rich, oaky Chardonnay. Serves six.

**1½ lb. trimmed mushrooms (portobello, shiitake, porcini, oyster)**  
**2 Tbs. balsamic vinegar**  
**2 tsp. roasted-garlic purée (or 1 tsp. fresh minced garlic)**  
**1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary**  
**2 tsp. chopped fresh sage**  
**½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**6 cups mixed greens**

#### **MUSTARD-SEED VINAIGRETTE:**

**2 tsp. whole mustard seeds**  
**1 Tbs. Dijon mustard**  
**2 Tbs. seasoned rice-wine vinegar**  
**½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme**  
**2 Tbs. fresh orange juice**  
**¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

#### **PARMESAN CHIPS:**

**1 cup freshly grated good-quality Parmesan or aged Asiago cheese**

**For the vinaigrette**—Heat the mustard seeds in a small, dry sauté pan until they're golden brown and fragrant and they just start to pop. Transfer immediately into a small bowl. Add the Dijon mustard, vinegar, thyme, and orange

juice and whisk to combine. Whisk in the olive oil a little at a time until the dressing is emulsified. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

#### **For the Parmesan chips—**

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment or coat with a very thin film of oil (or use a spray oil). Sprinkle about 1 Tbs. cheese in a thin layer to form 3-in. rounds, at least 2 in. apart. Bake in the heated oven until the cheese melts and forms lacy, golden brown chips, 5 to 10 min. Carefully remove the chips from the paper, using a thin spatula, and lay them on a rack to cool. If you want the chips to have a curved shape, transfer them from the parchment to a dowel or a small rolling pin and leave to cool. If not using immediately, store in an airtight container for up to two days.

**To assemble the salad**—Arrange the mushrooms in a shallow dish. In a bowl, whisk together the vinegar, garlic, rosemary, sage, and oil. Brush the mixture liberally onto the mushrooms; season to taste with salt and pepper and let marinate at least 30 min.

Heat a grill or a ridged grill pan. Grill the mushrooms (curved side down first) until softened and slightly charred, about 4 min. per side for large mushrooms like portobellos, 2 min. per side for smaller mushrooms. Divide the greens among six plates and drizzle with the mustard vinaigrette. Cut the grilled mushrooms into thick slices, if they're large, and arrange on the greens. Decorate the plate with a couple of Parmesan chips and serve immediately.

*John Ash is the culinary director of Fetzer Vineyards' Valley Oaks Food & Wine Center in Hopland, California. Ingredients for his salads come from the thousands of varieties of fruit, vegetables, herbs, and flowers in the Center's seven-acre organic garden. ♦*



*Find the flavors in the wine, and then match them to your salad. Herbal notes, smoky tones, or fruit flavors in the glass work well when they're echoed on the plate.*



*Sweet, crisp corn fritters and fluffy white rice are two of the side dishes in this tropical menu.*

# Contemporary Cuban Cooking

A menu that's bright and full of flavor

BY VIVIANA CARBALLO



## MENU

◆  
*Sopa de Pimiento*  
(Roasted red pepper soup)

◆  
*Fricasé de Pollo con Arroz Blanco*  
(Chicken stew with white rice)

*Tostones y Buñuelos de Maíz*  
(Fried green plantains & corn fritters)

*Ensalada de Aguacate y Cebolla*  
(Avocado & red onion salad)

◆  
*Torta de Queso con Mango*  
(Mango cheesecake)

I fled Havana (and Castro) in 1961. Since then, I've cooked, shopped, and tasted my way around the globe. Wherever I am, I adapt my cooking to local influences, but the tropical traditions and flavors of Cuba are never far from my heart. My cooking is typical of that of many Cubans living in the United States today. Some of the dishes are traditional, others are adaptations of old favorites, and a few are entirely new creations inspired by a culture that is constantly evolving.

### A RICH MIX OF CULTURES

Cuban cooking reflects the rich history of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Native foods such as corn, peppers, and cassava were changed forever when they met with Spanish cooking. The Spanish brought steaming, stewing, and frying to Cuba, along with new ingredients, such as pork, beef, onions, melons, radishes, beets, oranges, limes, and rice. The cultivation of sugar cane brought African slaves, who introduced okra, yams, and bananas to our larders. In a very short time, these influences married, and Cuban cooking was born.

Before you try your hand at this new Cuban cooking, let me remind you that it's a well-known fact that Cuban food tastes better if it's prepared to the strains of Cuban music. So put on some salsa and let the music be your guide.

### BEGIN WITH BRIGHT FLAVORS AND COLORS

I like to begin this menu with an intensely flavored soup of roasted red peppers, *sopa de pimiento*. I prefer to make it with freshly roasted peppers, but good-quality, smoky-tasting jarred peppers can be substituted. Plain pimientos won't do, and finding a good brand is worth your time. Peloponnesian or La Molinera are both excellent brands.

Because the peppers are the dominant flavor in this recipe, homemade chicken broth can be a lot of work without much payoff. Using a good-quality canned broth will save both work and money. Make

*Red pepper soup is delicious hot or cold. A swirl of sour cream complements the spicy-smoky roasted red peppers. A bit of chopped onion and a few sprigs of cilantro are the finishing touches.*





**A sweet-salty stew.**  
The typically Cuban flavors of this delicious chicken fricasé come from slow cooking with an aromatic sofrito, green olives, and sweet raisins.

the soup a day ahead so the flavors can develop and marry. It's delicious served either hot or cold, and because you make it ahead of time, it's great for entertaining. If you do serve this soup cold, remove it from the refrigerator an hour before serving, because too much cold will dull the flavors.

A swirl of sour cream thinned with a little milk will add just a touch of richness to help balance the smokiness of the peppers. I also like to add a sprinkling of minced onions and some cilantro to complete the presentation.

#### **A SWEETLY AROMATIC FRICASE**

*Fricasé de pollo*, or chicken stew, is a traditional Cuban dish in concept, but this version reflects the

changing times. Originally, the chicken was cut into pieces and browned in pork fat, vegetables were then sautéed in the fat, and finally the chicken was returned to the pan with chopped olives, capers, and raisins. All was left to simmer and develop the sweet, salty taste that is so much a part of the Cuban cook's repertoire.

The chicken tasted wonderful, but as you ate it, you could almost feel your arteries clogging. So to lighten the dish, I use olive oil instead of lard. If you choose, you can also remove the chicken's skin before searing. A splash of red wine helps develop the deep flavors and rich sauce.

#### **A TRIO OF TRADITIONAL SIDE DISHES**

As the main dish, the chicken offers complex flavors, so the side dishes can be simpler in character. I like to serve three traditional favorites.

**White rice.** White rice is a Cuban staple if ever there was one. I make it the traditional way, with a little oil, salt, and 1 1/3 cups cold water for each cup of long-grain rice: this produces a fairly dry and firm rice, with each grain remaining separate. It all goes into a heavy casserole over high heat, where I bring it to a boil, cover it immediately, turn the heat to low, and leave it to simmer slowly for 20 minutes. Then I remove the pan from the heat, uncover it, fluff the rice with a fork, cover the pan again, and let it rest for 10 minutes.

**Tostones.** Plantains are basically large, starchy bananas, and they're as much a staple in the Cuban diet as potatoes are in other countries. They're eaten at all stages of ripeness, from the very hard and starchy green or *verde* plantain, to the yellow-brown or *pinton*, to the black, fully ripened, and very sweet *maduro*.

For *tostones*, which are twice-fried chunks of plantain served as a savory snack or side dish, you'll need green plantains. When shopping for plantains, look for ones that feel hard and have a solid green color with no black spots. If left at room temperature, plantains will continue to ripen, so to keep them green, refrigerate them immediately after you buy them.

To peel a green plantain, use a sharp knife and slice off the ends. Slice the plantain into two-inch lengths and then cut slits along the natural ridges of





*Choose the greenest plantains you can find to make tostones. Plantains are a variety of cooking banana used throughout the Caribbean and other parts of Latin America.*



*Smash the plantain slices flat between two layers of brown paper bag. This will expose the starchy interior before a second frying.*



*Drain tostones well to keep them from tasting greasy, first against the pan and then on paper towels. Sprinkle them with salt and eat them while they're hot.*

the skin, cutting through just to the flesh. Using the sharp edge of the knife, lift the skin away from the flesh, pulling it crosswise rather than lengthwise. To keep green plantains from staining the skin under your fingernails black, you may want to perform this operation under cold running water.

After the plantains are peeled and cut, keep the slices in water that's mixed with a little lemon juice until you're ready to fry them. This will keep the fruit from darkening.

**Corn fritters.** Caribbean cooks believe that anything edible is greatly enhanced by deep-frying. So we not only fry our plantains, but we also fry lots of fritters, especially ones made with corn. These corn fritters are embedded in every Cuban's taste memory.

For best results when making corn fritters, you must allow the baking-powder batter to rest 15 to 30 minutes before cooking so the leavening can do its magic; otherwise, the fritters will be flat instead of puffy. The frying oil for the fritters should be at a medium-high temperature—350° to 375°F.

Drop the batter into the oil by the teaspoon or tablespoon. Only a few fritters should be cooked at a time so the oil doesn't cool down. As they cook, keep the oil moving slowly by "drawing circles" in it with a slotted spoon. Turn the fritters over as they brown. The first side usually takes two minutes and the other side slightly less; they should be golden when done. If the fritters split open while cooking,

add a little more flour to the batter. Always use a slotted spoon to remove the fritters from the oil and allow them to drain on paper towels before serving. Fritters don't reheat well, but they can be kept warm in a low-temperature oven.

#### **A SIMPLE SALAD**

In Cuba, there is no tradition of eating salad greens—lettuce just doesn't grow in the tropics, and the imported iceberg lettuce, which we refer to as *lechuga Americana*, or American lettuce, is not part of the Cuban palate. It's more in keeping with Cuban tastes to make a salad of avocado slices and thin yellow or red onion rings with a little salt, a drizzle of olive oil, and a squeeze of lime. I compromise, however, and serve a small amount of avocado and chopped red onion on a bed of spring greens with a sprinkling of salt and lime juice and a dash of olive oil.

#### **FRAGRANT MANGO FOR DESSERT**

To finish this Cuban meal filled with deep flavors, rich colors, and interesting textures, I serve a mango cheesecake. I have a very prolific mango tree (affectionately known as "La Generosa") in my back yard in Miami, and its fruit has inspired many great recipes—including this one.

My cheesecake is based on an Italian recipe that uses ricotta. I punch up the flavor by adding

## Sofrito

*Sofrito* is the cornerstone of Caribbean cooking, the taste of the islands. It is the Caribbean version of the aromatic sautéed vegetable mixtures used in many different cuisines—the Italian *battuto*, the French *mirepoix*, and the Catalan *sofregit*. Like its European counterparts, *sofrito* is used as an aromatic building block when making many soups, stews, and sauces.

As with any *cocina del pueblo* (which translates loosely to “everyday cooking”), the recipes for *sofrito* vary greatly. In its simplest form, *sofrito* can be a mixture of chopped and lightly sautéed onions and garlic. The recipe might also include vegetables and herbs like green and red bell peppers, tomatoes, and cilantro. There are countless versions, and each county, city, neighborhood, family, and cook takes pride in guarding its “authentic” recipe. But virtually all *sofritos* begin with the basics, and almost every recipe from the Spanish Caribbean begins with “*haga un sofrito con...*” (“make a *sofrito* using...”).

Many cooks make a basic *sofrito* in large quantities and refrigerate it to use as needed. Then they add other ingredients, customizing the *sofrito* for soups, stews, fish dishes, or beans. This allows the *sofrito* to be made in advance, but it still enables the cook to build up many layers of flavor. Some cooks also purée the finished *sofrito* so that it blends smoothly into dishes.



### BASIC SOFRITO

This can be made ahead and stored in the refrigerator for up to a week. Chop all vegetables the same size—about 1/8-inch dice. The vegetables should be cooked slowly. If you're making a large batch, cook the *sofrito* for about 1 hour, stirring often. (Slow really is better, but I confess that if I'm in a hurry, I cook the *sofrito* over high heat, stirring constantly, for 3 or 4 min.) Yields about 1 cup.

2 Tbs. olive oil  
1 medium onion, diced (about 1 cup)  
1/2 green bell pepper, diced (about 1/2 cup)  
1/2 red bell pepper, diced (about 1/2 cup)  
4 cloves garlic, minced  
1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1 tsp. minced fresh oregano  
Add to suit your tastes: more garlic,  
1 bay leaf, 1/4 to 1/3 cup chopped cilantro,  
1 minced jalapeño or 1/2 minced Scotch  
bonnet pepper, 1 Tbs. tomato paste,  
1/2 cup chopped fresh tomatoes

Heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low, stir in the onion, and cook, stirring, about 1 min. Add the remaining ingredients. Continue cooking slowly for about 15 min.

### SOFRITO FOR MEAT & CHICKEN

Substitute 1/4 cup diced slab bacon plus 1 Tbs. oil for the oil in the basic *sofrito* recipe. Add 1 Tbs. tomato paste, 1/2 cup chopped fresh tomatoes, and 1/3 cup chopped pimiento-stuffed olives (optional).

### SOFRITO FOR FISH

Begin with the basic recipe but omit the red bell pepper, use 1 cup diced green bell pepper, and add 1/4 cup chopped parsley, chopped cilantro, or a mixture of the two.

### SOFRITO TO USE IN BEAN DISHES

Add 1/4 cup diced slab bacon or 1/3 cup ground or diced baked to the basic *sofrito*. When making black beans, simply use the basic *sofrito* without any meat.

some candied ginger and finish it off with a drizzle of fresh mango purée.

To pick out a good mango, smell the fruit. It should have a faint aroma, especially around the stem. No perfume usually means no taste (this is true of most fruit). If the mango smells sour or like alcohol, discard it: it has begun to ferment. Choose firm fruit that's just beginning to show some yellow or red in the skin (only a few lesser-known varieties remain green when ripe). The skin should be tight around the flesh. Once it loosens, the mango is past its prime and should be used only for drinks or purées.

### SOPA DE PIMIENTO

(Roasted red pepper soup)

Roasting the peppers yourself will give this soup a mild, smoky flavor that's certain to jump-start any appetite. Serve it hot or chilled. Serves six.

5 red bell peppers, roasted, peeled, cored, and seeded (or a 14-oz. jar roasted red peppers, drained)  
1 Tbs. olive oil  
1/2 cup minced onion  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1/8 tsp. cayenne  
3 1/2 cups low-salt chicken broth  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
Sour cream, thinned slightly with milk  
Diced onion  
Parsley or cilantro sprigs

Purée the roasted red peppers in a food processor. Heat the oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Sauté the onions and garlic until soft and translucent. Add the cayenne and then the pepper purée; stir to combine. Stir in the chicken broth, add salt and pepper to taste, and simmer 10 min.

Divide the soup among six bowls and swirl some sour cream into each bowl. Garnish with diced onion and sprigs of parsley or cilantro.

### FRICASÉ DE POLLO

(Chicken stew)

Traditionally, this *fricasé* is made with a whole cut-up chicken, but I find that the dark meat has more flavor and is better suited to stewing; white meat has a tendency to become dry. This dish stores well in the refrigerator



and reheats well, but it loses flavor when frozen.  
Serves six.

*1/4 cup flour*  
*1/4 tsp. salt*  
*1/8 tsp. freshly ground black pepper*  
*1/4 tsp. paprika*  
*2 1/2 lb. chicken thighs*  
*2 Tbs. olive oil*  
*1 cup basic sofrito with cilantro (see sidebar opposite)*  
*1/4 cup tomato sauce*  
*1/3 cup chopped pimiento-stuffed olives*  
*2 Tbs. drained capers*  
*1/4 cup dark raisins*  
*1/2 cup red wine*  
*Salt and freshly ground black pepper*  
*2 Tbs. chopped cilantro*

Mix the flour with the salt, pepper, and paprika. Dredge the chicken thighs in the flour mixture; shake or pat to remove excess flour.

In a heavy pot, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat and put in the chicken. Cook until lightly browned on all sides. Do this in two batches to avoid crowding, which would cause steam and prevent the meat from browning.

When all the chicken is browned, remove it from the pot; drain off any fat left in the pan. Add the *sofrito*, tomato sauce, olives, capers, raisins, and wine and stir to blend. (If you prefer a bit more sauce, add a little more chicken broth or water, but not wine, which would make it too acidic.)

Return the chicken to the casserole with any accumulated juices. Stir to coat the chicken with the sauce; cover and simmer until the thighs are completely tender when pierced with a knife, about 45 min.



*Rich but not heavy. Using olive oil instead of the traditional lard helps to lighten the flavor of this chicken stew. To cut down on fat, you can use skinless chicken thighs.*



## TOSTONES

*(Fried green plantains)*

Tostones, a kind of twice-fried green banana, are a staple food all over the Caribbean. They're great on their own, simply salted and eaten hot, or they can be served with a sauce as an appetizer. Serves six.

*Vegetable oil for frying*

*2 large green plantains (1 1/2 lb. total), peeled and cut into slices 2 in. thick*

*Salt*

In a heavy, deep-sided skillet (preferably cast iron), heat about 1 in. of oil over medium heat to 350°.

Fry the plantain slices in oil 3 to 4 min., just until they begin to color very lightly; don't crowd the pan. Turn and cook on the other side. Drain on paper towels.

When the plantain slices have cooled slightly, lay a piece of brown paper bag or paper towel on top of each slice and, using your fist or the palm of your hand, flatten the slice to about 1/2 in. Do this while the plantains are hot; they'll be too hard when they cool.

Increase the oil temperature to 375° and return the plantains to the pan. Fry for 2 to 3 min. or until golden, turning once. They're done when they rise to the top and make a little pop. Drain on paper towels, sprinkle with salt, and serve hot, or they'll harden.

## BUNUELITOS DE MAIZ

*(Corn fritters)*

These fritters are a perfect complement to the *Fricas  de Pollo* as well as to roast chicken or pork chops. They're quite

### Bananas and beer?

*They may look like the bananas you're used to, but these savory plantains are a perfect side dish or snack when fried and sprinkled with salt.*



*Sweet, ripe mangoes and a hint of candied ginger make for a tropical dessert. The author uses mangoes from a tree in her own back yard when she makes this cheesecake.*

sweet, so they also can be served as dessert with honey or warm molasses. Serves six.

**2 cups fresh, well-drained canned, or thawed frozen corn kernels**  
**1 cup flour**  
**¼ cup sugar**  
**1 tsp. baking powder**  
**½ tsp. salt**  
**2 eggs, lightly beaten**  
**Vegetable oil for frying**

In a food processor fitted with a metal blade, process the corn kernels into a coarse purée; set aside.

Sift the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt into a bowl. Add the eggs and the corn purée; stir to combine well. The batter should be quite thick; add more flour if it looks too loose or a bit of milk if too thick. Lightly cover the batter and set aside for 15 to 30 min. (This will make the fritters fluffier.)

Heat about 1 in. of oil in a large, deep-sided skillet (preferably cast iron) to 350° over medium heat. Drop the batter by the tablespoon into the oil; don't crowd the pan. Fry the fritters, turning them until golden on all sides, 3 to 5 min. Drain on paper towels and keep warm.

### **TORTA DE QUESO CON MANGO**

*(Mango cheesecake)*

This recipe is a classic Italian cheesecake made with the king of tropical fruits, the mango. Serves eight to ten.

**½ lb. cream cheese, softened to room temperature**  
**1 lb. ricotta cheese**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**2 Tbs. flour**  
**6 eggs**



Photo: Matthew Kesterbaum

*Add the diced mangoes last so they don't sink to the bottom during baking.*

**1 cup mango purée (see Basics, pp. 76–77)**  
**1 Tbs. lemon juice**  
**1 Tbs. finely chopped crystallized ginger**  
**1 large mango, diced (¾ lb. or 1 cup)**

Heat the oven to 350°. Butter and sugar a 9-in. springform pan. Fit an electric mixer with a paddle attachment and put the cream cheese in the mixing bowl; beat until the cheese is smooth and creamy. Add the ricotta and mix well. (You can mix by hand with a wooden spoon, but don't use a food processor, as it will change the texture and consistency of the cheeses. Also, don't use the whisk attachment on your mixer because the cheeses will get stuck in it.)

Slowly beat in the sugar and flour, and then beat in the eggs, one at a time. Add ½ cup of the mango purée, the lemon juice, and the ginger; beat just to combine. Pour the mixture into the prepared pan and sprinkle with the diced mango. (This method will preserve the shape and texture of the cut fruit and prevent it from sinking to the bottom.)

To prevent spills and to distribute the heat more evenly, put the pan on a heavy baking sheet. Bake 1 hour. Turn off the oven and let the cheesecake sit in the oven for another hour. Allow to cool completely before slicing.

To serve, drizzle individual plates with the remaining mango purée and place a slice of cheesecake on each.

*Viviana Carballo earned a grand diplôme from Le Cordon Bleu and has tasted her way through Paris, Jakarta, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and many other exotic locales. She now lives in Miami. ♦*

















# Consommé, Clear and Simple

Pure, intense flavor, with hardly a hint of fat

BY IRVING SHELBY SMITH

I'm not given to "raised-pinkie" pronouncements, but I just can't bring myself to call consommé a soup. The graceful poise of a good consommé has a calming effect on the mind. It's civilized. You may think that I'm being precious or fanciful, but serve one up sometime and you'll no doubt notice that it's all but impossible to race through a consommé. Jazzy soups, funky soups, and hearty country-style soups may be more comforting and folksy, but to me none is as compelling as consommé. After all, if we are what we eat, what better way to be than clear and concentrated?

Today's taste for vibrant flavors that are low in fat has led to a rediscovery of this French classic. More and more chefs are realizing that consommé is an exceptionally pure vehicle for aroma and flavor. And consommé's shimmering clarity makes for a stunning presentation. While consommé requires several steps, the process is straightforward and, once mastered, can lead to infinite improvisation with flavors and garnishes.

## NO WIMPY STOCKS

A good consommé depends on a very rich stock, whether it be chicken, beef, seafood, or vegetable. Wimpy, watery stocks won't work. Make your stock

strong enough by using extra amounts of fresh meaty bones or aromatic vegetables. You can also reduce a finished stock by boiling gently to concentrate flavor. But don't cook it down too much or it will taste flat and dull. For a gallon of finished stock, about 45 minutes reducing is the limit. Starting out extra-strong is crucial because the very things that give stock flavor—all those tiny

particles that also make it murky—will be removed during the clarification. Skimming a stock regularly while it simmers will also produce a clearer, better-flavored stock.

## FROM MURKY TO CRYSTALLINE

The transformation from cloudy stock to clear soup is quite amazing. It's carried out by the proteins in a mixture



*Liquid gold.* Consommé has a purity of flavor and clarity of aspect like no other soup. And it's low in fat—perfect for today's taste for bold but lean food.





*These simple ingredients have amazing powers—egg whites, aromatic vegetables, and poultry, meat, or fish transform murky stock into an intense, amber consommé. The proteins in these ingredients coagulate during simmering and act like a superfine filter.*

called a clearmeat—egg whites, some ground or chopped meat (except when making vegetarian consommé), and some aromatic vegetables and seasonings for flavor. When the stock and the clearmeat are heated, the particles in the stock coagulate with the egg white and meat protein. In effect, the stock is filtered. You can also add tomatoes to the clearmeat, as their acid will help the coagulation, but they'll darken the consommé slightly.

I make clearmeat by first chopping up onions, celery, carrots, and the principal flavoring ingredient (seafood, chicken, beef, or mushrooms depending on what consommé I'm making). Then I mix this with egg whites, salt, and pepper and process it in a food processor until very fine. You can use egg whites alone, but I prefer to use other ingredients as well to boost and fine-tune the flavor of the finished consommé. Seasonings, such as salt and pepper, are added to the clearmeat because you don't want to add them to a finished, perfectly clear consommé. The stock itself should also be well seasoned.

**Mix everything gently—and then stand back.** The clarification process begins by whisking about two cups of cool or warm stock into the clearmeat and then adding this mixture to the rest of the stock. If you've just made your

stock and it's still hot, take extra care to whisk the stock, a little at a time, thoroughly with the clearmeat so the heat doesn't coagulate the eggs too soon.

The next step is to bring the whole thing to a gentle simmer over high heat, stirring constantly and gently to prevent the clearmeat from settling at the bottom of the pot and burning—which will ruin everything. A good tool for this is a long-handled spatula or flat-ended spoon that will scrape the bottom of the pot. Don't rush this stage—if the clearmeat cooks too quickly, it won't take in all of the suspended particles and thoroughly clarify the stock.

When the stock reaches a boil, immediately turn down the heat as low as possible while still maintaining a gentle simmer. Stop stirring. The clearmeat will gradually coagulate and rise to the top as a crust, called the "raft." The raft acts as a filter, trapping all the tiny suspended particles as they bubble up through it. Use a ladle or a large spoon to poke a hole in the raft, called a chimney, if a hole doesn't form naturally. The raft will set up better if you baste it occasionally by carefully ladling some stock over it. Don't let the stock boil, which will break up the raft and ruin the clarification of the consommé.

After the raft forms, let the stock simmer gently, undisturbed, for about

*Not pretty, but effective. This chunky mass of egg whites, chopped beef, and vegetables is called a "raft." As the ingredients coagulate in the hot stock, they float to the top to form a solid filter. Once they're set, a hole is poked in the top so the liquid can bubble freely through the raft.*



20 minutes, or until perfectly clear and richly flavored. If the consommé isn't clear after 30 minutes of simmering, most likely the raft has broken up or has stuck to the bottom of the pot. In this case, strain the stock, discard the raft, and begin by making a fresh clearmeat mixture using the same stock.

**Ladling and straining the filtered liquid.** Now the trick is to retrieve the crystal-clear consommé without mixing up the raft. Just work slowly so you can control the liquid and solids separately. Line a sieve with a clean, damp, lint-free cloth. Ladle the consommé through the lined sieve. Don't try to force the liquid through the sieve, which will only cloud the consommé. When you get down to the bottom of the pot, tilt it over the sieve to pour out all of the free-running consommé; use the ladle to keep the raft from falling out of the pot. Throw away the raft (or feed it to the dog) and set the consommé aside to cool. Consommé is high in protein and therefore vulnerable to bacterial growth, so cool it quickly; I use an ice-water bath.

Remove any traces of fat from the consommé by blotting the surface with paper towels. A well-made consommé will be fat-free, and it will keep for three days in the refrigerator or up to three months in the freezer.



*This is no ordinary chicken noodle soup. Tiny ravioli, julienned vegetables, and herbs are the garnish for this chicken consommé, but you can use almost anything as a garnish as long as it won't cloud the soup.*

enough to go straight into the liquid. Here are some of my favorite additions:

- ◆ infuse the consommé by steeping with fresh herbs or spices: rosemary, tarragon, lemongrass, saffron
- ◆ flavor the broth *before* clarification with ground spices (adding them to the finished consommé would make it cloudy): Indian *garam masala*, Chinese five-spice
- ◆ vegetables cut in neat julienne, tiny dice, or *parisienne* (pea-sized balls made with a tiny melon baller), small asparagus tips, fresh peas, tiny mushrooms
- ◆ dried beans and legumes: black beans, black-eyed peas, navy beans, adzuki beans, lentils
- ◆ pastas, stuffed or unstuffed: tortellini, ravioli, wontons, bow-ties, orzo
- ◆ grains like pearl barley or wild rice
- ◆ delicate slices of meat, chicken, or fish, either the same type as the consommé or a different type for contrast
- ◆ small shellfish: shrimp, clams, scallops, mussels, lobster claws
- ◆ last minute accents: blanched strips of citrus zest, edible flowers, or a few drops of flavored oil.

## Adding accents to consommé

Now that you've gone through all the fuss to make your limpid liquid, you'll probably want to choose a final seasoning and garnish to make it even more

intriguing and attractive. Almost any ingredient is possible as an accent to consommé, as long as you like the way the flavors, textures, and colors work with the pale, clear liquid.

I always cook garnishes ahead so their flavors stay distinct from the flavor of the consommé. And some things, like pastas or beans,

would absorb too much consommé during cooking. Use only nonfat methods to cook your garnishes (boiling, steaming) because any fat used in cooking will ruin the clarity of the consommé. Two exceptions to the cook-ahead rule are peeled, seeded, and diced tomatoes or sliced fresh truffle; both are soft



## BEEF STOCK

*Yields about 3 quarts rich stock.*

**8 lb. meaty beef or veal bones, or a combination**  
**2 onions, chopped coarse**  
**2 carrots, chopped coarse**  
**2 ribs celery, chopped coarse**  
**5 qt. cold water**  
**2 cloves garlic, peeled**  
**1 tsp. black peppercorns**  
**4 sprigs fresh thyme or 1 tsp. dried**  
**1 bay leaf**

Heat the oven to 450°F. Spread the bones in large shallow roasting pans and roast for 40 min. or until well-browned. Turn the bones, add the onions, carrots, and celery, and roast another 20 min. Transfer the roasted bones and vegetables to a pot that holds at least 10 qt. Pour off the fat from the roasting pans and deglaze them with 2 cups of the water. Add this to the pot, along with the remaining water, the garlic, peppercorns, and herbs.

Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low, and simmer uncovered for 5 to 6 hours, skimming occasionally. Strain. Taste and reduce for flavor if necessary. Chill immediately in an ice bath or in the refrigerator. When chilled, skim off the fat.

## CHICKEN STOCK

*Yields about 3 quarts rich stock.*

**8 lb. chicken bones, trimmed of fat (necks and backs work well)**  
**Ingredients (except beef and veal bones) from Beef Stock recipe above**

Combine all the ingredients in a pot that holds at least 10 qt. Bring to a boil, lower the heat and simmer uncovered for 4 hours, skimming occasionally. Strain. Taste and reduce for flavor if necessary. Chill immediately in an ice bath or in the refrigerator. When chilled, skim off the fat.

## MUSHROOM STOCK

*Yields about 3 quarts rich stock.*

**½ lb. dried wild mushrooms, such as shiitakes or porcini**  
**Ingredients (except beef and veal bones) from Beef Stock recipe at left**

Using a pot that holds at least 8 qt., follow the method for Chicken Stock (at left), cooking only about 1½ hours. There won't be any fat to skim.

## SEAFOOD STOCK

*Yields about 3 quarts rich stock.*

**3 qt. cold water**  
**3 cups crisp, acidic dry white wine, such as Sauvignon Blanc**  
**5 lb. white fish bones, cut into 5-in. pieces (lobster, shrimp, or crab shells may be used, too, but avoid fatty fish such as salmon)**  
**Ingredients (except beef and veal bones and water) from Beef Stock recipe at left**

Follow the method for Chicken Stock (at left), cooking only 30 min.

## CONSOMME

The process is the same no matter which consommé you're making—beef, chicken, mushroom, or seafood. And consommés aren't limited to these flavors, either. Experiment with other meats (lamb, venison), poultry (duck, turkey, or pheasant), and different types of vegetables, fish, and shellfish. Whatever ingredient you use, just be sure your stock is well balanced and full of flavor. *Yields about 2 quarts.*

### FOR THE BASIC CLEARMEAT:

**5 large egg whites**  
**1 onion, chopped**  
**1 carrot, chopped**  
**1 rib celery, chopped**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

### FOR BEEF CONSOMME:

**¾ lb. lean beef, ground or chopped**  
**2½ qt. rich Beef Stock (see recipe at left)**

### FOR CHICKEN CONSOMME:

**¾ lb. boneless, skinless chicken breast, chopped**  
**2½ qt. rich Chicken Stock (see recipe at left)**

### FOR MUSHROOM CONSOMME:

**¾ oz. dried mushrooms, reconstituted**  
**2½ qt. rich Mushroom Stock (see recipe at left)**

### FOR SEAFOOD CONSOMME:

**¾ lb. scallops, shrimp, white-fleshed fish, or a combination**  
**2½ qt. rich Seafood Stock (see recipe at left)**

Combine the basic clearmeat ingredients with the beef, chicken, mushrooms, or seafood in a food processor. Process until very fine. Mix about 2 cups of the stock with the clearmeat and pour the mixture into the rest of the stock. Bring to a boil slowly, stirring constantly and gently. When the mixture begins to boil, immediately turn down the heat to a simmer and stop stirring. Allow the raft to form and make a chimney by poking a hole in the raft if an opening doesn't form on its own.

Simmer the consommé for 20 to 30 min., until perfectly clear. Remove from the heat. Gently ladle the consommé into a sieve lined with a clean, damp cloth set over a bowl. Allow to drain slowly through the sieve. Tilt the pot and drain off all the free-running consommé, using the ladle to hold back the raft. Remove any fat from the surface of the consommé by blotting the surface with paper towels. Cool quickly in an ice bath or in the refrigerator.

*Irving Shelby Smith is a professional chef and a food and wine writer in Burlington, Vermont. ♦*

*Careful ladling for maximum clarity. After simmering until it's clear, ladle the consommé through a damp cloth as a final filter.*



*Tilt the pot to get the last few drops. Pour off the free-running consommé. As you get to the last few drops, use your ladle to hold back the pieces of the raft.*

# Delicious Indian Chaat

Spicy fruit and vegetable salads are perfect “fast food” for hot weather

BY BHARTI KIRCHNER



*This simple brown powder gives chaat its personality. Chaat powders can contain dozens of ingredients, and the powders you can buy in Indian groceries contain herbs and spices that are virtually unavailable in America. It's relatively easy, however, to find ingredients that will allow you to make your own.*



*Chaat combines the sweet and the savory. Here, papayas blend with red onions, jalapeños, and lime juice for a zingy fruit salad.*

**T**he tangy, fresh salads called *chaats* are wildly popular across Northern India, where I grew up. Mostly known as “fast food,” *chaats* are sold by vendors who line the streets outside school gates, museums, and movie theaters. India is still marked by castes, but rickshaw puller and corporate executive alike gladly line up together for *chaat*.

Unlike American fast food, *chaats* are nothing but fresh. These salads are light, juicy, crunchy, spicy, easy to make, and can serve as appetizers,

snacks, or side dishes. They also require minimal cooking, which is always a bonus when preparing food at home during one of India's blistering summer days.

## THE CHARM OF CHAAT

While there are many different kinds of *chaat* (pronounced CHAHT), all take their charm from the same elements: spice, crunch, sweetness, juiciness, and tartness.



The crunch can be provided by a vegetable (cool chunks of cucumber, shreds of cabbage, or diced sweet red onion), but *chaat* vendors often give their salads crunch with fried *papri*. These small puffs are cut from a wheat dough and deep-fried. But *papri* is something that's best enjoyed at the *chaat* stand, where their constant preparation guarantees crisp *papri* chips. At home, it takes too long to fry a batch of *papri* large enough to serve four people. By the time the last batch is done, the first will have lost much of its crunch. That's why I recommend tortilla chips—the ones you'd use to scoop salsa—as a *papri* substitute. Mexican tortilla chips are not at all traditional to *chaats*, but they provide the right crispness and textural interest.

Water-rich fruits and vegetables make *chaat* a refreshing snack, even a thirst quencher. They also provide a cooling effect that contrasts nicely with the hot spices. Soothing yogurt is also sometimes mixed with spices to top *chaat*.

There's a gentle sweetness that laces many *chaats*. Occasionally its source is simple sugar, but the sweetness usually comes from subtler sources, such as date-rich chutneys, fruits, or even sweet vegetables like corn and tomatoes. The sweetness never has a chance to become cloying; it's always countered by a measure of tartness, often from the lime juice that dresses the salad. Tartness is essential to *chaat*.

## THE RIGHT SPICE

Without the right spices, a *chaat* is just a well-composed salad. That's why Indian groceries sell a blend of herbs and spices called *chaat* powder that immediately makes a salad taste like *chaat*. It's hard to define this powder's alchemy; the *chaat* blend seems to have no home other than in *chaats*, and no *chaat* is complete without it. The powder gives *chaat* its distinctively sweet-sour-savory-spicy flavor. All *chaat* vendors know the value of this stuff; each has his own secret blend. I often buy the prepared *chaat* powder because it contains hard-to-find herbs and spices; however, I offer a recipe for making a simpler version (see p. 67).

Since my recipes are adaptations of the street vendor's originals, not all of them use *chaat* powder, but every recipe does contain at least a few elements found in that characteristic blend. The most distinctive of these spices—and probably the ingredient most responsible for making a *chaat* taste like a *chaat*—is black salt. Black salt isn't really black; it's a pinkish-gray rock salt from India. It has a distinct, even slightly sulfurous odor, but it's worth any nose-wrinkling; even a small sprinkling of it adds an appealing earthy flavor to *chaat*. Don't omit it or substitute white salt. The two salts taste nothing alike, and there is no substitute for black salt.

Finally, follow the *chaat* vendor's cue and make *chaats* just before serving. They can be served cold, but this is an American habit. In India, where refrigerators aren't as common, *chaats* are served at room temperature. Although I've lived in America for more than 20 years, I still prefer eating *chaat* at room temperature. Eating cooled salads can numb the tongue, and I want to savor every juicy, crunchy, spicy bite.

## LEMONY CORN CHAAT

(*Bhutta chaat*)

This delightful salad of corn, cucumber, sweet onion, and tomatoes is best in the summer, when fresh corn and vine-ripened tomatoes are abundant. Serves four.

1 cup fresh corn kernels or frozen corn (thawed)

2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

1 tsp. grated fresh ginger

1 jalapeño, cored, seeded, and minced

1 Tbs. minced cilantro leaves

½ tsp. black salt

Dash cayenne

1 cup peeled, seeded, and diced cucumber

1 cup diced red onion

1 cup seeded and diced tomatoes

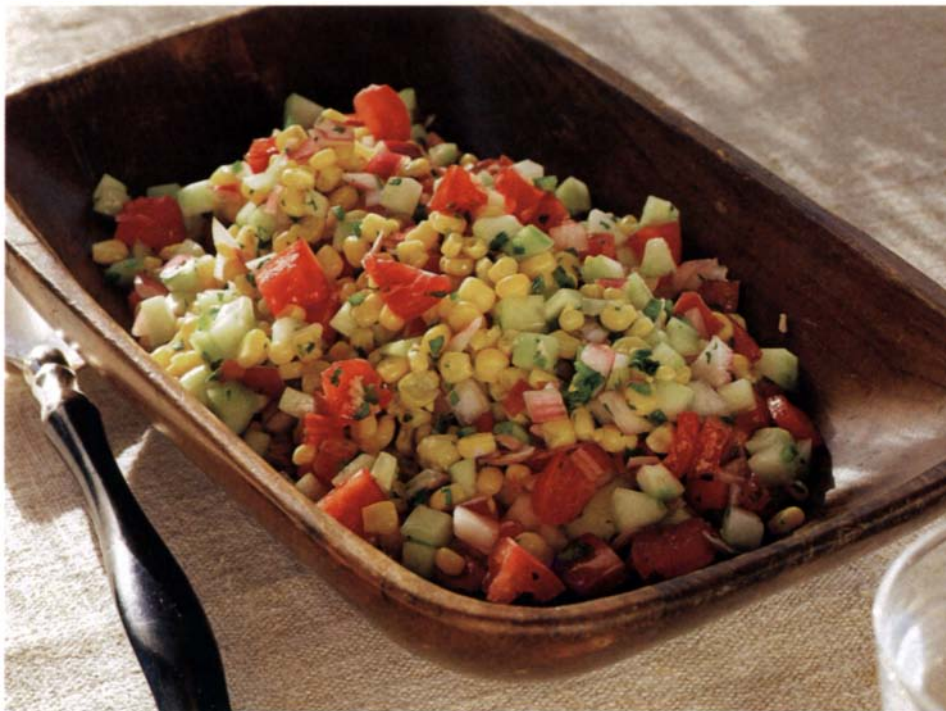
Salt to taste

Ground toasted cumin seeds (optional)

Steam or boil the corn just until tender. Cool to room temperature.

Combine the lemon juice, ginger, jalapeño, cilantro, black salt, and cayenne in a large bowl; mix well. Add the corn, cucumber, onion, and tomatoes, and toss gently to coat the vegetables. Add salt to taste. If you like, sprinkle with ground cumin seeds before serving.

(Continued)



This corn salad is great for picnics. Tomatoes and corn are always summertime favorites, but the addition of fresh ginger and black salt makes this combination truly memorable.

## A chaat glossary

While you'll be familiar with most of the seasonings used in *chaats*, some will be quite new unless you're well acquainted with Indian cuisine. Take the time to find the unfamiliar spices, which have no substitutes; they're available at most Indian groceries and from mail-order suppliers (see sources at right). This glossary should help you understand the spices, as well as what purpose they serve in the *chaat*.

◆ **ASAFETIDA.** This is the dried gum resin of a plant related to fennel. Asafetida is available in lump form if you want to grind it yourself, and as a powder. To use it, add a small amount to hot oil and sauté the spice to release its flavor. When heated, the scent of asafetida is very similar to that of onions and garlic.

◆ **CUMIN SEED.** You've probably used ground cumin, but the ground cumin used both in preparing *chaat* powder and as a final garnish should be made from whole cumin seeds that you toast and grind yourself. The flavor difference is incomparable. Put the cumin seeds in a dry skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently and watching them carefully. In a matter of minutes, the seeds will turn medium brown and become very fragrant. Immediately remove them from the heat and grind them to a powder in a spice grinder or with a mortar and pestle.

◆ **MANGO POWDER.** This brown powder, also called *amchoor*, is made from dried, unripe mangoes. It adds a pleasant tartness to *chaat*.

◆ **MUSTARD SEEDS, BROWN OR BLACK.** These seeds are smaller than the more common yellow variety. They add crunch and a mild, toasty flavor. Before adding them to *chaat*, quickly sauté them in a little oil until they pop.

◆ **TAMARIND.** The dried pulp of the fruit of the tamarind tree adds a complex sourness to *chaat*. The recipes in this article call for tamarind concentrate, which is available in jars.



*Hot oil releases asafetida's flavor. Here, the oil has been heated in a kadhai (an Indian wok) before adding the asafetida, a gum resin that tastes and smells very much like onions and garlic when it's added to hot oil.*

### SOURCES FOR CHAAT INGREDIENTS

Adriana's Caravan, 409 Vanderbilt St., Brooklyn, NY 11218; 800/316-0820 or 718/436-8565.

Foods of India, 121 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016; 212/683-4419.

Herb 'n' Lore, 11 Nadine Ct., Thousand Oaks, CA 91320; 805/499-7505. (Checks and money orders only.)

Indian Grocery Store, 2342 Douglas Rd., Coral Gables, FL 33134; 305/448-5869. (Certified checks, money orders, and CODs only.)

Seema Enterprises, 10616 Page Ave., St. Louis, MO 63132; 314/423-9990 or 314/391-5914.

### CHICKPEA & ARUGULA SALAD

(Chhole chaat)

In a twist on this Indian favorite, I add arugula leaves, which give a distinctively nutty taste. Cool yogurt and spicy tamarind sauces are drizzled on top. Serves four.

#### FOR THE YOGURT SAUCE:

1 cup nonfat or low-fat plain yogurt, stirred until smooth  
¼ cup nonfat or low-fat milk, more if necessary  
2 tsp. sugar  
Salt to taste  
Pinch cayenne

#### FOR THE TAMARIND SAUCE:

8 pitted dates  
1 jalapeño, cored, seeded, and chopped  
1 tsp. minced fresh ginger  
1 tsp. tamarind concentrate  
¾ cup water  
Salt to taste

#### FOR THE SALAD:

3 cups home-cooked or canned chickpeas, drained  
1 tsp. ground cumin  
Black salt to taste  
Tortilla chips  
1 cup chopped arugula

For the yogurt sauce—Combine the yogurt, milk, sugar, salt, and cayenne in a small bowl. Stir until smooth, adding a little more milk as needed to make a pourable sauce.

For the tamarind sauce—Process the dates, jalapeño, ginger, tamarind, water, and salt in a food processor until smooth. The sauce should be the texture of warm preserves; add a little water if the mixture is too thick.

For the salad—Heat the oven to 350°F. Combine the chickpeas, cumin, and black salt in a bowl and mix well. Spread the mixture on a baking sheet and bake for 15 min., or just until the tops of the chickpeas are lightly browned.

Crush a few tortilla chips and put them on individual serving plates. Arrange the chickpeas and arugula over the chips. Drizzle the yogurt and tamarind sauces over the salad and serve immediately.



*Tortilla chips make a good substitute for traditional Indian papri chips in chhole chaat, one of India's favorites. Spice-tossed chickpeas are dressed with two sauces—one made with yogurt, the other with tamarind. The author adds arugula to her version.*





*Delicious chaat or fat-free potato salad? Cilantro, jalapeños, and lime juice create a spicy paste that's tossed with warm boiled potatoes. The potatoes quickly absorb the tangy dressing, ensuring intense flavors in every bite.*

### FRUIT SALAD WITH CHILE-LIME DRESSING

(Pepe chaat)

I like to use firm, ripe papayas for this dish, but apples also work well. Serves four.

3 Tbs. fresh lime juice  
2 jalapeños, cored, seeded, and minced  
½ tsp. sugar  
¼ tsp. black salt  
3 cups cubed, firm, peeled papaya or unpeeled apples  
(Gala or another firm, sweet apple)  
1 cup coarsely chopped red onion  
1 tsp. canola oil  
¼ tsp. asafetida powder  
¼ tsp. black mustard seeds

Combine the lime juice, jalapeños, sugar, and black salt in a large bowl. Add the papaya and onion; toss until well coated.

Heat the oil in a small skillet over medium-low heat until sizzling. Sprinkle the asafetida powder over the oil. Add the mustard seeds and cook until the seeds begin to pop. Pour this mixture over the fruit and stir.

Taste and add more black salt if necessary. You can serve this chaat immediately or chill it for up to 3 hours.

### TANGY POTATO CHAAT

(Alu chaat)

For those concerned with the fat content of most potato salads, this chaat is ideal. Potatoes are steeped in a fat-free lime dressing and tossed with chiles, cilantro, and fresh ginger. The result is a tangy blend of diverse and complementary flavors. Serves three to four.

¼ cup coarsely chopped cilantro  
1 Tbs. cored, seeded, and chopped jalapeño  
8 to 10 fresh mint leaves  
1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh ginger

1½ lb. waxy potatoes (preferably Yellow Finn or Yukon Gold),  
peeled and cut into 1½-in. cubes  
¼ cup freshly squeezed lime juice  
½ tsp. chaat powder (see recipe below)  
½ tsp. salt

Put the cilantro, jalapeño, mint, and ginger in a food processor and process until finely chopped. Set aside.

Steam or boil the potatoes until they can be pierced easily with a fork, 15 to 20 min.

Meanwhile, mix the lime juice, chaat powder, and salt in a large bowl. Add the cooked, drained potatoes and toss gently to coat; they will absorb the juice quickly. Add the herb paste and toss again. Taste and adjust seasonings. Serve immediately or chill for 45 min. and serve cold.

### CHAAT POWDER

This is the most basic version of the spice mix that gives a chaat its distinctive flavor. I like to make it in small amounts to preserve the spices' freshness. Yields about 1 tablespoon.

2 tsp. mango powder  
Scant ¼ tsp. whole cumin, toasted and ground  
¼ tsp. ground ginger  
¼ tsp. black salt  
½ tsp. asafetida powder  
Freshly ground black pepper  
Dash cayenne

Combine all ingredients. Grind to a fine powder in a mortar and pestle or a spice grinder. Store in a tightly covered jar.

Bharti Kirchner is the author of *Indian Inspired* and *The Healthy Cuisine of India*. Her third cookbook, *The Bold Vegetarian*, was published this year by HarperCollins. ♦

# Great Skate

Sweet, succulent, and easy to handle, this fish deserves a taste-test

BY BOB SARGENT

Skate is great, but nobody seems to know it. This odd-looking fish (think stingray) is mild, sweet, and easy to eat because it has only a couple of pieces of flat cartilage instead of lots of tiny bones. Skate has a luxurious, silky texture, but it's quite low in fat. And it's cheap. In Europe and Asia, skate has been a long-time favorite, but despite its many virtues, it's relatively unknown in the United States. That's beginning to change, however, as more common varieties of fish become scarce and the fishing industry looks for a new catch.

## A FISH WITH WINGS?

Skate is closely related to the shark; both have an odd circulatory system, slimy-yet-rough skin, and cartilage instead of bone. Skate are commonly known as



*Give skate a quick turn on the grill. The moist meat takes on a touch of smoke and a crispy, slightly charred outer edge.*



rays or stingrays, and more than a dozen edible subspecies are commercially harvested. From the cook's point of view, the only real consideration is the size of the skate's wings. The wings are the only part of the skate that have any meat; fortunately, they make up the largest part of the skate's anatomy. The rest of the skate's body will make a very flavorful and gelatinous stock, but it's otherwise unusable.

## HOW TO BUY SKATE

Skate is sold in three forms: whole skate, skin-on wings, and skinless wings. It's very uncommon to see whole skate, even if you have a great fish market. You're most likely to find some form of skate wing. An average wing weighs about two pounds and will provide about 1½ pounds of boneless meat. An average portion of boneless, skinless skate is about six ounces.

Like all seafood, skate is highly perishable, and poor quality is indicated by a distinct fishy or ammonia smell. The flesh should be shiny, firm, and almost odorless. If you're lucky enough to find skin-on skate, the skin should be covered with slime that smells slightly sweet and fresh. If you detect any odor of ammonia, the skate is already past its prime, and you're better off waiting for fresher fish. If you don't have a source of good-quality, fresh fish, ask your local grocer to order some frozen skate wings. Often, frozen skate is of better quality and has been handled with more care than fresh skate. When buying frozen skate wings, be sure to ask for skinless wings, as the skin can be particularly difficult to remove if it has been frozen.

**Create a local market for skate.** While skate has become available to restaurant chefs around the country, it isn't yet a regular catch for most shoppers. But there is a sure way to bring skate to your fish counter: ask for it. If your local fishmongers know there's a demand for skate, they'll probably be happy to supply it.

## DEALING WITH THE WINGS

Skate wings have a unique internal structure that can take even the most experienced fish cooks by surprise. Instead of a bony skeleton, a layer of soft cartilage runs through the middle of the wing, separating two layers of meat (skate's equivalent of fillets). Skate wings are seldom available without the cartilage, but with a little work, the wings can be filleted while raw, or the meat can be easily removed after cooking.

The flavors of small and large skate wings are equally delicate, but I prefer the texture of smaller wings because they're particularly succulent. While smaller wings are great for many cooking methods, they're especially suited for quick, high-temperature techniques, such as grilling, sautéing, and frying. Thicker wings are best poached, as this method helps prevent the flesh from becoming dried out or stringy, which might occur with longer cooking at higher temperatures.



**Only one "bone."**  
The only internal support this fish has is a flat piece of cartilage that separates the two layers of flesh.

**Skinning**—If your recipe calls for skinless wings, try to buy them already skinned, or talk your fishmonger into doing the deed for you. If you have to skin the wings yourself, you'll find the process a little tedious but not impossible. Start by sliding a sharp knife between the skin and the flesh at the thickest part of the wing. With the blade parallel to the flesh, carefully separate the skin. Use short, firm strokes while tugging gently at the skin. The difficulty is that the skin has a tendency to tear in odd ways, and



**Skinning skate.**  
1. Pull back the skin with one hand (above) as you make short, firm strokes with the tip of your knife.  
2. When you reach the thin edge of the wing, gently scrape the skin away (left).



#### **Cutting boneless fillets.**

1. Keep the knife blade pressed firmly against the cartilage to prevent any tears in the meat (above).
2. Roll the meat back as you work (right) to produce a clean fillet.



once it has, it's hard to get a handle on it again.

**Skinless wings are easily made boneless** (or, more accurately, cartilageless) by using the same basic technique used for skinning, except that you're separating flesh from bone rather than skin from flesh. Don't forget that there's meat on both sides of the cartilage. When I cook skate for myself, I rarely go to the trouble of boning it, as it's easier to simply eat around the cartilage—much easier than eating around most fish bones. But I've found that my customers are more receptive to boneless fish, so I've gotten used to removing skate cartilage regardless of the cooking method.

*Poaching safeguards the sweet, succulent flavor of skate. Once poached, the skin should come off easily. The simple court bouillon in which the skate was poached can be strained and used as the base of a rich fish chowder.*



#### **TECHNIQUES TO BRING OUT SKATE'S BEST**

I choose cooking methods that highlight the distinct qualities of skate—techniques that will play off skate's mild, moist, silky sweetness. A crunchy cornmeal crust, a tart citrus dressing, or a spicy chile rub are all satisfying foils for skate.

**Poaching in court bouillon.** Poaching and other moist cooking methods are particularly wonderful when you're working with skin-on skate, but will also do justice to skinless wings. Skate skin helps retain a lot of the natural juices and flavors in the flesh, not unlike the way poultry skin moistens and enriches the meat below.

Poaching skate has two distinct benefits: it's a gentle cooking method that leaves the meat extremely moist and tender; and it produces a flavorful poaching liquid that has lots of body (especially if you use gelatin-rich skin-on wings), which can be used as the base for soups and chowders.

**Sizzling on the grill.** Grilling is probably the least common but most interesting way to cook skate. The sweet flavor of the flesh is nicely offset by the smoke, and the soft texture is balanced by a slightly charred, crunchy crust. The rules for successfully grilling fish—a clean, hot grill and a lightly oiled fish—are especially important when grilling skate. Skate wing is more prone to sticking than many other types of fish because of its delicacy and high moisture content. You can't move it around on the grill as you might a swordfish or tuna steak. For grilling, I always recommend using boneless fillets. The pieces are a little harder to handle, but they cook very quickly and don't cool down the grill, which can cause sticking.

**Lots of possibilities.** Unlike many white, flaky fish, skate is fairly "sturdy": it will hold together well during cooking, and the meat won't become overcooked in a matter of seconds. This means there are lots of cooking methods to choose from. In addition to grilling, frying, and poaching, skate is excellent when sautéed. Steaming and stir-frying are also quick and easy cooking methods that can be adapted to make great skate.

#### **GRILLED CHILE-RUBBED SKATE WING WITH SWEET CUCUMBER SALAD**

The spice rub in this recipe is well suited for the grill. It has enough oil to help prevent sticking and will also take on some of the grill's smoke. Be sure your grill is very hot and scraped clean. Teflon-coated fish grills are best. *Serves four.*

*1½ lb. skinless, boneless skate wing*

#### **FOR THE SPICE RUB:**

- 1-in. cube of peeled ginger, diced fine*
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled*
- 2 jalapeños or other hot peppers, diced (seeds in)*
- 2 chipotle peppers (canned or reconstituted dried)*
- ¼ cup vegetable oil*
- 1 tsp. ground cumin*
- ½ tsp. turmeric*





#### FOR THE CUCUMBER SALAD:

3 Tbs. rice vinegar  
1 Tbs. lime juice  
2 Tbs. superfine sugar  
1 tsp. sesame oil  
2 Tbs. vegetable oil  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
2 large cucumbers, peeled, halved, seeded,  
and sliced  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. thick  
1 small red onion, sliced  
1 medium carrot, cut in julienne  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  medium red bell pepper, cut in julienne  
2 Tbs. thinly sliced scallions  
2 Tbs. chopped cilantro

Combine the ingredients for the spice rub in the work bowl of a food processor and purée until smooth. Spread over the skate fillets and chill for  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour.

Mix the rice vinegar, lime juice, sugar, sesame oil, vegetable oil, salt, and pepper in a container that you can seal, and shake to dissolve the sugar. Combine the remaining ingredients and toss with the vinaigrette. Let the salad rest while you grill the skate.

Light the grill and scrape any excess spice rub from the skate. Season with salt and place on the hot grill. Cook for 3 to 4 min. and then turn carefully with a metal spatula. Cook 2 min. longer, until the skate is quite tender and flakes easily. Arrange the skate fillets and the cucumber salad on plates.

#### CITRUS-MARINATED SKATE SALAD WITH BASIL AIOLI

I like the way the citrus in this dressing brings out the skate's sweeter accents. Serves eight.

$1\frac{1}{2}$  lb. skin-on skate wing (or skinless, but should have cartilage), cut into 4 or more pieces  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. mesclun greens or other small, delicate lettuces  
2 oranges, peeled and segmented  
2 grapefruit, peeled and segmented  
2 limes, peeled and segmented  
8 basil leaves, cut in chiffonade (thin ribbons)  
Freshly ground black pepper

#### FOR THE COURT BOUILLON:

1 onion, quartered  
2 cups dry white wine  
6 sprigs thyme  
1 tsp. black peppercorns  
2 bay leaves  
1 rib celery, split lengthwise  
1 leek, chopped coarse and washed  
1 Tbs. kosher salt

#### FOR THE CITRUS DRESSING:

Juice of 1 lime  
Juice of 1 lemon  
Juice of 1 orange  
1 Tbs. minced shallot  
1 tsp. Dijon mustard  
2 Tbs. chopped parsley  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
6 Tbs. olive oil

(Ingredient list continues)

*A light and lacy skate salad. Poached skate is gently flaked and tossed with a citrus dressing, which helps to bring out the fish's sweeter flavors.*

**FOR THE AIOLI:**

2 egg yolks  
 1/3 cup packed basil leaves  
 1 clove garlic  
 1/2 cup vegetable or light-flavored olive oil  
 1 Tbs. lemon juice  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the court bouillon ingredients in large sauté pan or a shallow braising pan. Bring to boil and simmer for 10 min., skimming occasionally. Add 1 qt. cold water; return to simmer. Add the skate, reduce the heat, and cover. Simmer gently for 5 to 10 min., until the flesh easily separates from the cartilage and appears opaque throughout. Transfer the skate to a warm platter and remove the skin carefully; it will peel right off. Slice the flesh from the cartilage and cover to keep warm.

**For the dressing**—Combine the citrus juices, shallot, mustard, parsley, salt, and pepper. Whisk in the oil 1 Tbs. at a time.

**For the aioli**—Put the egg yolks, basil, and garlic into the work bowl of a food processor and blend until smooth. With the machine running, add the oil slowly. Add the lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Refrigerate until ready to use.

**To assemble the salad**—Gently flake the skate and toss with half the dressing. Chill for 1 to 6 hours. Just before serving, toss the greens with the remaining dressing and arrange on large plates. Mix the citrus segments in with the skate and divide among the plates. Drizzle with the aioli and top with the basil chiffonade and a turn of freshly ground black pepper.

**CORNMEAL-FRIED SKATE WINGS**

The crispy coating of cornmeal keeps the skate moist on the inside. Serve these wings with lots of cold beer and your favorite cole slaw. *Serves four.*

1 1/2 lb. boneless, skinless skate wing  
 1 cup buttermilk  
 1/4 cup yellow cornmeal  
 3/4 cup flour  
 1 tsp. salt  
 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
 2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme, more sprigs for decoration  
 1 cup vegetable oil  
 2 lemons, cut in wedges  
 1/4 cup chopped parsley

Cut the skate into four equal pieces and let them soak in the buttermilk for a few minutes. In a shallow bowl, combine the cornmeal, flour, salt, pepper, and chopped thyme. Dredge the skate pieces in the cornmeal mixture and shake off the excess. Heat the oil in a heavy skillet or frying pan over medium heat until it barely begins to smoke. Carefully add the skate to the oil in a single layer. If they won't fit in a single layer, fry them in batches. Cook for 3 to 4 min., until the crust is lightly browned. Turn and cook another 2 to 3 min.

Remove the skate from the pan and drain on paper towels. Arrange the skate on plates with the lemon wedges, a few thyme sprigs, and a sprinkle of chopped parsley.

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*Bob Sargent is the chef at the Harvest Restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where skate is a regular offering on the menu. ♦*

*Boneless fillets cook quickly, so watch them closely. The buttermilk and cornmeal coating helps keep the fish from drying out.*





# Perfecting Pavlova

Make this crisp-chewy meringue even better with a topping of passionfruit cream

BY NICKY MAJOR

**L**ight but creamy, crisp but chewy, sweet but tangy—these contrasting flavors and textures are only part of why I think Pavlova is such a fantastic dessert. It's also colorful, pretty, and best of all, it's easy to make, once you've gotten the hang of it. And believe me, I've gotten the hang of it after more than twenty years of making Pavlovas in all sizes and varieties at my catering company in Vancouver, where it's my signature dish.

Pavlova has a base of meringue shaped into a free-form disk—kind of cloudlike—that's topped with whipped cream and fresh fruit. I make Pavlovas in three sizes: large, like a cake; individual, which are pretty for dinner parties; and mini, just about one-and-a-half bites and perfect for buffets and receptions. The thing that makes Pavlova different from other meringue desserts is that the meringue is crisp on the outside but soft and chewy, almost marshmallowy on the inside.

The dessert was named after the famous Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova, but exactly who invented and christened the dish is unclear. Australians will say an Australian chef is responsible, but, as a New Zealander, I know it was a Kiwi chef.

## FLAVORS AND FILLINGS

Because I'm from New Zealand, my favorite way to flavor Pavlova is with kiwis, of course, and with a



*A Pavlova cross section shows crisp outside, fluffy inside. This dual texture makes Pavlova different from other meringues.*

*Mini Pavlovas make a sweet mouthful, topped with a single slice of kiwi or a berry or two. These tiny desserts are easy to assemble and serve for receptions.*



*A perfect Pavlova has juicy fruit, cool cream, and crisp-chewy meringue. It also usually has some cracks, so don't worry about them.*

passionfruit cream. But I also love the way bright red and purple berries look against the delicate off-white meringue shell, so I'll use whatever fruit is at its peak and works with the rest of the menu.

That's another great thing about Pavlovas—versatility. I can make it exotic with tropical fruit, or sweet and pretty with summer strawberries and raspberries, or even peaches and blueberries. As for the cream filling, a passionfruit purée is delicious, but if you can't find it, try another fruit purée, such as mango or raspberry. Or you can flavor the cream with vanilla extract and a little liqueur or brandy.

Although there's a lot of sugar in the meringue, the dessert isn't really very sweet. By leaving the cream filling unsweetened and piling it with fresh, sweet-tart fruit, Pavlova is satisfying but not over the top. And you can even make it fairly low in fat by cutting back on the cream a bit so you're eating mainly fat-free meringue and fresh fruit.

Pavlova is pretty on its own, but ever since a client asked for his to be served with chocolate sauce, I've really enjoyed a drizzle of the stuff on the side. Raspberry sauce is nice, too; use it to make a stunning presentation.

#### **SIMPLE INGREDIENTS, PRECISE TECHNIQUES**

Pavlova doesn't require very many ingredients—mostly superfine sugar and egg whites—but it does require precise measurements. Put the egg whites in a measuring cup to check the volume before you add them to the bowl. Add or subtract half a white if necessary to get just barely  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup.

**Timing is crucial to Pavlova**—It takes a lot longer than you might think to whip the whites and add the sugar. And you don't want any interruptions, so assemble and measure all your ingredients, gather all your equipment, and turn on your answering machine because you won't be able to stop to take a quick phone call. The first tablespoon of sugar is the most important. It really needs to be added slowly and only when the whites are fully whipped, even to the point where they look like they're about to get "grainy" and dry. As soon as the sugar goes in, the egg whites will be out of danger of overbeating.

**Temperature plays a part in your success**—The temperature of your kitchen and of the ingredients is as important as that of the oven. Try to work in a cool, dry kitchen—meringues are temperamental in humidity. Your egg whites should be warm, however, so they'll whip up to full volume more easily. Warm



the bowl of your mixer under hot water before you start, and then keep the bowl slightly warm (not hot) during whipping by wrapping the base with a warm, damp towel. A steady, accurate oven temperature is crucial, so check it with an oven thermometer. If the oven is too hot, the Pavlova will start to brown and the outside will get too crisp before the inside is done. Heat the oven to 275°F and then turn it down to 250° as soon as you put in the Pavlova. The extra heat at the beginning will compensate for the heat you lose when the door is open. Don't put two baking sheets of Pavlovas in the oven at once unless they fit on the same rack; even heat and air circulation are vital for Pavlovas to cook and color correctly.

If you need to get a head start, you can bake the meringue up to two days ahead, cool it completely, and then store in an airtight container until you're ready to serve. And if you ever find yourself in the unlikely position of having leftover Pavlova, just freeze the whole thing—fruit, cream, and all—and enjoy it later as a frozen dessert.

### PASSIONFRUIT PAVLOVA

Even if you like using hand tools, don't try making this dessert without an electric mixer, preferably a stand mixer—you simply won't have enough whipping power. The finished meringue base will be slightly cracked, which is normal and part of its cloudlike appearance. *Yields one large Pavlova, about 10 individual ones, or about 30 minis.*

#### FOR THE MERINGUE:

*Scant ¾ cup egg whites (from 5 large eggs), totally yolk-free*  
*¼ tsp. cream of tartar*  
*Pinch salt*  
*1½ cups superfine sugar*  
*5 tsp. cornstarch, more for the baking sheet*  
*2 tsp. distilled white vinegar*  
*1 tsp. vanilla extract*

#### FOR THE FILLING:

*2 cups whipping cream, chilled*  
*1 Tbs. honey (optional)*  
*¼ cup passionfruit purée or pulp (optional)*  
*About 3 cups cut-up fresh fruit or berries*  
*Mint sprigs and confectioners' sugar to decorate*

Position the oven rack just below the middle of the oven. (If you have an electric oven, put a shallow pan of water on or close to the bottom of the oven.) Heat the oven to 275°F. Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment. Dust the sheet with cornstarch to help the meringue come off easily after baking.

Run a large, stainless-steel mixing bowl under hot water to warm it. Dry the inside thoroughly, add the egg whites, cream of tartar, and salt. Set the bowl in the mixer and surround the base of the bowl with a warm, damp dishtowel to keep the egg whites warm.

Whip the whites at medium-high speed until they're stiff and start to pull away from the sides of the bowl; they'll look like they're about to separate. Immediately start adding the superfine sugar by sprinkling it in slowly, about 1 Tbs. at a time; incorporating the whole 1½ cups should take about 10 min. Combine the cornstarch with the last 2 Tbs. of sugar and add them together. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, continue whipping, and slowly add the vinegar and vanilla. Whip for another minute. The mixture should be extremely glossy and fluffy.



*Two scoops for an individual Pavlova. Smooth out the sides with a spatula to join the two halves, but leave the shapes swirly for a prettier finish.*

◆ **For a large Pavlova**—Spread the meringue on the prepared baking sheet into a 7-in. round, about 3 in. high, using a spatula or spoon. Make a shallow depression in the center to allow for the filling. The shape should be even but still free-form with some swirls and peaks.

◆ **For individual Pavlovas**—Use a 3-oz. ice-cream scoop and stack two scoops, snowman-style, for each Pavlova. With a narrow spatula, smooth the sides to join the two scoops, and make a depression in the center.

◆ **For mini Pavlovas**—Use a 1-oz. ice-cream scoop or two tablespoons. Drop one scoop onto the parchment for each Pavlova and make a small depression in the center.

**To bake**—Put the Pavlova in the heated oven and immediately turn down the heat to 250°. Bake, without opening the door for at least the first 45 min. (less for minis), until they're crisp and dry looking on the outside with just a hint of ivory color—minis, 35 to 40 min.; individuals, 1 to 1¼ hours. For a large Pavlova, bake 1½ hours, and then turn off the heat and leave it in the oven, with the door cracked, for another 30 min. Remove the Pavlova from the oven and put the baking sheet on a rack to cool.

**To assemble**—Up to 1 hour before serving, whip the chilled cream in the mixer or by hand until it holds soft peaks. Add the honey, if using, and whip another few seconds to blend, until the cream holds slightly firmer peaks. Carefully fold in the passionfruit purée with a spatula until it's mostly combined but a few streaks are left showing.

Carefully peel off the meringue from the parchment and set it on a serving platter or plates. Fill the center with the passionfruit cream and top with fresh fruit, letting a little fruit spill down the sides if you like. Decorate with mint sprigs and a sprinkling of confectioners' sugar. Keep cool and serve within 1 hour.

*When your egg whites look like this, start adding sugar—pronto. A few more seconds and the whites will become grainy and separated, but if you add the sugar too early, the whites won't reach their full volume.*



Nicky Major moved to Canada from New Zealand, with a stopover in London to study at Le Cordon Bleu. She owns Major the Gourmet, a catering and gourmet takeout company in Vancouver, British Columbia. ◆

Here we offer quick “technique classes,” so you can learn new skills or refresh the skills you already have, from choosing and handling raw ingredients, to using tools, to preparing basic recipes, such as stocks, sauces, and pastry doughs.



*Mango halves cut into cubes make a ready-to-savor snack.*

## Choosing and Using Mangoes

The mango is one of the world’s most sensuous fruits. Once you’ve tasted a mango, you’ll know why people throughout the equatorial regions of the world regard it as the “king of fruit.” Here are some techniques for handling this succulent, but slightly awkward fruit.

### CHOOSE THE RIPEST FRUIT

To choose a good mango, smell it. It should have a faintly sweet aroma, especially

around the stem. No perfume generally means no flavor. If the fruit smells sour or like alcohol, it’s past its prime. Choose firm fruit that is just beginning to show some yellow or red in the skin. The skin should be tight around the flesh; loose skin means the mango is old. A large mango weighing  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 pound will yield about 1 cup diced mango or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup purée. Usually,  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 cup diced mango is enough for a serving if the fruit is being eaten alone.

**To ripen a mango,** keep it at room temperature. When ripe, the fruit will become more aromatic, its skin will take

on a blush, and its flesh will yield gently to the touch. If you want to hurry the ripening process, put a few mangoes in a paper bag with a banana. The natural gases exuded by the banana will hasten the ripening of the mangoes. Only when mangoes are fully ripe can you refrigerate them, but only for up to three days: they are a tropical fruit and don’t take kindly to the cold.

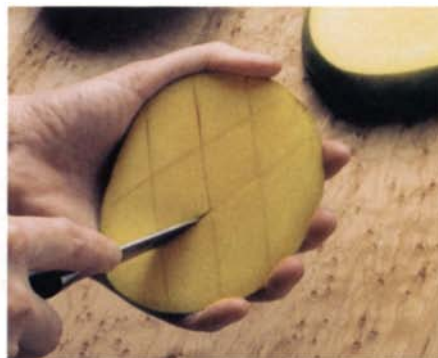
### SLICING, PEELING, AND CUBING

This fruit has a large, flat central pit that you need to cut around. To start, set the mango with its stem facing you and its narrow side against your cutting board. With a sharp knife, cut the “cheeks” from both sides of the central pit (see photo below left). Once you’ve removed the mango’s cheeks, you can easily peel them using a sharp paring knife or a vegetable peeler. Peel the skin from the remaining pit section and cut the flesh from the sides of the pit. The flesh closest to the pit is the most fibrous and is sometimes even tough. While this part of the mango will not yield the wonderful chunks of meat that the cheeks do, it’s just as delicious.

Slicing the mango into wedges or a fan of thin slices is easy once you’ve removed the cheeks. Lay the cheeks face down on your cutting board and slice them lengthwise. While peeling the mango first will make the cheeks easier to slice, you can also serve slices or



*To slice the most flesh from a mango, hold it firmly with the narrow side up and cut as close to the pit as you can. Repeat on the other side.*



*To cut the mango halves—or “cheeks”—score in a crosshatch pattern, taking care not to cut through the skin.*



*Release the cubes of mango by folding the “cheek” inside out. Remove the cubes with a spoon, knife, or your finger.*



wedges of mango with the skin still on, as you would a melon.

To cube a mango, cup an unpeeled cheek in your hand and, using a cross-hatch or diamond pattern, gently score the flesh down to—but not through—the skin (see bottom center photo, opposite). With a large spoon, scoop the diamond-shaped pieces off the skin into a bowl. Or, you can turn the skin inside out by holding the mango with both hands so that your thumbs are holding the cut edges and you're pressing your fingers on the back of the cheek (see bottom right photo, opposite).

If you plan to use the mango in a recipe, be sure to taste the fruit and adjust the amount of sugar in the recipe accordingly.

**Mango purée**—To make a purée, toss diced or sliced mango in a food processor and whiz away. It's easy to compensate for an unspectacular mango by sweetening the purée: just add a little brown sugar and a bit of dark rum, if you wish.

—Viviana Carballo, food writer, Miami

## The Right Techniques for Fresh Chiles

Fresh chiles are becoming more available all the time, and few supermarkets are without the ubiquitous jalapeño. But the range in quality can be discouraging, and it can be difficult to distinguish fresh chiles from ones that have been on the shelves a while. When shopping for fresh chiles, look for those with smooth, tight skin and a thick, meaty body. A fresh chile should have some heft relative to its diminutive size.

If you won't use your chiles right away, keep them cool and dry. You can refrigerate them, but be sure to first remove them from the plastic produce bag; otherwise, they'll become soft and moldy. The length of time that chiles will stay fresh in the refrigerator depends on how fresh they were when you bought them, but generally they'll keep for three or four days without suffering any loss of freshness. Once the chile's skin begins to wrinkle, it will lose some of its potency, and if

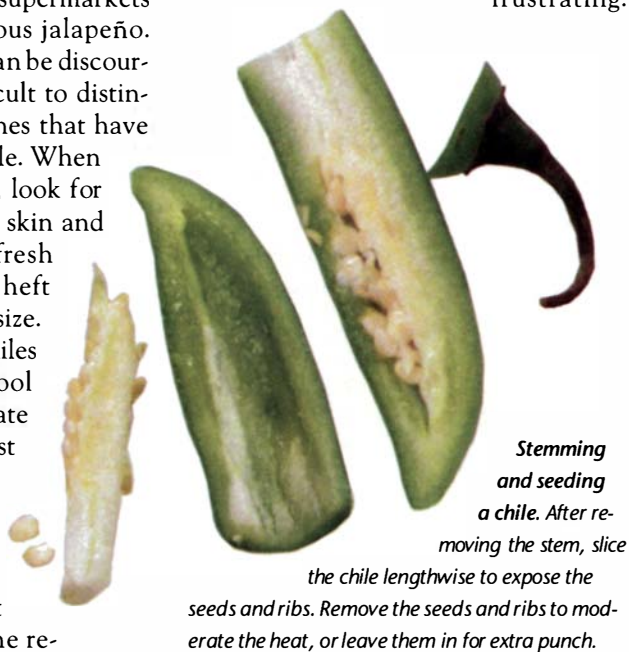


**Protection with a grip.** Surgical gloves protect sensitive skin from chiles' painful sting, and they improve your grip.

you're roasting or blanching them, the skins will be difficult to peel.

### THINK ABOUT SAFETY

Unless you have particularly tough hands, it's a good idea to use rubber gloves when handling fresh chiles. Many cookbooks recommend using dishwashing gloves, but I find that these are rather clumsy and that getting a handle on small chiles while wearing them can be frustrating.



**Stemming and seeding a chile.** After removing the stem, slice the chile lengthwise to expose the seeds and ribs. Remove the seeds and ribs to moderate the heat, or leave them in for extra punch.

Instead, I like to keep a few pairs of surgical gloves around the kitchen. Available at most drugstores, surgical gloves are cheap, disposable, and best of all, they allow you to get a firm grip on the chiles.

Once you've begun working with the chiles, be extremely careful not to touch any part of your body, especially your eyes. After you've finished, wash your knife and cutting board with hot soapy water.

### THE HEAT'S IN THE RIBS AND SEEDS

Capsaicin is the chemical compound that gives chiles their heat. An alkaloid, capsaicin is distributed throughout the chile, but the heaviest concentration of capsaicin is found in the white pith on the inside of the chile—those ribs that hold the seeds in place. Further down on the scale of concentration are the seeds and then the chile's flesh, which has the least amount of capsaicin. This gives you a convenient way of controlling the amount of heat that the chile contributes to a dish. To get the most bang out of the chile, use it whole; for a milder flavor, simply trim out the seeds and ribs.

### CUTTING CHILES THE EASY WAY

Start by cutting off the entire stem, and then slice the chile in half lengthwise. With the tip of a paring knife, you can remove the seeds and ribs by slicing or nudging them with the knife point. With seeds and ribs out of the way, the chiles are easily cut into strips or a fine dice.

### REMOVING THE SKINS

Many dishes, especially Mexican and Southwestern recipes, call for the chiles to be peeled. You can do this by first charring or blanching the whole chiles. To char, rub them with a little oil and then set them directly over a gas burner. Turn the chiles frequently with tongs or a fork to prevent burning through to the flesh. When the skins have charred and blistered slightly, pop the chiles into a plastic bag and let them steam in their own juices for about 20 minutes. The skins should now rub off easily.

Blanching chiles won't give you the smoky flavor that charring does, but the technique is great if you don't have a gas stove. Simply drop the chiles into boiling water for 30 seconds or so, and then plunge them into ice water. Once the chiles have cooled, they can be skinned just as if they were charred.

—Bob Sargent, chef, Harvest Restaurant, Cambridge, Massachusetts

(Continued)



## Whipping Cream Successfully

Whipped cream can add luxury and richness to almost any dessert, and when sweetened, it's a perfect foil for accent flavors such as vanilla, rum, or your favorite liqueur. There are only a few key elements to making perfect whipped cream.

The most important factor is to begin with chilled cream, chilled bowls, and chilled beaters. Cream whips best if it is below 45°F, so chill everything in the freezer or refrigerator first. If your kitchen is especially warm, work in a stainless-steel bowl over an ice bath.

**Which cream?** Use cream labeled “whipping cream,” “light whipping cream,” or “heavy cream”—all have a butterfat content between 30% and 40%. “Light cream” (with only 20% butterfat) will whip, but it won't trap as much air or hold it very well. The richer the cream, the better it will whip.

**A choice of equipment.** Use a balloon whisk, a hand-held electric mixer, or a stand mixer, but be aware that powerful mixers can quickly overwhip the cream.

**Pay attention when you whip.** Begin slowly to avoid splattering. To incorporate the



***Aim for pillows of cream.** Correctly whipped cream should fall in soft dollops from a spoon or spatula. With a touch of sugar and vanilla extract, whipped cream makes fresh strawberries a luscious dessert.*

most air, move the whisk or beaters up, down, and around the sides of the bowl while whipping. When the cream begins to thicken, whisk more quickly (medium high on an electric mixer) until the cream forms soft peaks and falls in large dollops from a spoon. The cream will have doubled in volume. If you whisk too long, the cream will lose its gloss and clump up as it begins to turn into butter. This happens rather suddenly, so pay attention.

You can rescue cream that's marginally overworked by gently adding a few spoonfuls of fresh cream. For decorative work, whip the cream until it's a little stiffer. You can then use it as icing or pipe it through a pastry bag.

**Sweetening and flavoring.** To make sweetened whipped cream, called *crème*

*Chantilly*, add up to 3 tablespoons of confectioners' sugar for each cup of cream. Add the sugar to the whipped cream just before it becomes soft and billowy. Don't use granulated sugar—it takes too long to dissolve.

Using confectioners' sugar, which has a small amount of cornstarch in it, will also help to keep the whipped cream from falling too quickly, especially if you want to add liquid flavorings. You can

add a teaspoon of vanilla extract, rum, brandy, or liqueur for each cup of cream without causing the whipped cream to collapse. Add any liquid flavoring to the finished whipped cream and then whisk briefly by hand to incorporate it and to bring back any lost volume.

**Whipped cream won't last.** Whipped cream won't stay whipped for long, and it's best to prepare it immediately before you use it. If you need to work ahead, you can refrigerate the whipped cream for up to two hours. Just before serving, whisk the cream briefly by hand to thicken it up.

—Molly Stevens, chef/instructor, New England Culinary Institute, Montpelier, Vermont. Fine Cooking welcomes Molly as a contributing editor. She will write regularly for the Basics department. ♦

***Decorating with whipped cream.** Simply whip the cream a little stiffer than usual and load it into a pastry bag that has been fitted with a decorating tip. Use gentle pressure to produce delicate ruffles and precise rosettes.*





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# Sugar's Surprising Powers

This sweet stuff makes foods moist, tender, smooth, and golden brown

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER



*Sugar plays many roles in cooking and comes in many forms. Shown here, from upper left, white and brown cubes, amber crystals, and honeycomb. All culinary sugars are fructose or glucose.*

When you think sugar, you usually think sweet. But sugar is much more than just a sweetener. It helps give some cooked food its appealing golden brown look and roasty, toasty smell; it helps keep baked goods moist and fresh; it can prevent food from spoiling; and it helps regulate the texture of many foods. Sugar knowledge means cooking knowledge and more control for the cook.

## THE KEY TO SUGAR'S BEHAVIOR IS ITS READY-BONDING SHAPE

Sugar is made of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen. These atoms are joined in different ways to produce different types of sugar. In cooking, we use ingredients that are made of two basic sugars: glucose and fructose. These sugars can exist alone or in combination with each other. When a molecule each of glucose and fructose

bond and kick out a water molecule, you get sucrose—table sugar.

The molecules have sets of hydrogen and oxygen atoms (hydroxyl groups) sticking out; this makes sugar eager to bond with other things, especially water. The shape and ready-bonding nature of sugar molecules are what give sugar its versatile powers.

## SUGAR GRABS WATER, WHICH MOISTENS AND PRESERVES

Sugar is hygroscopic, meaning it's a great water grabber. It absorbs water from the atmosphere and from liquids in the recipe, keeping baked goods moist, tender, and fresh. Fructose is more hygroscopic than other sugars, so things made with honey, which is 42% fructose, will stay soft and moist longer.

This also means that cookies made with honey will become soft on standing. Candies like lemon drops contain fructose also, and they tend to get gooey on the surface, which is why they're frequently rolled in sucrose to give them a surface barrier of less hygroscopic sugar.

Sugar's tendency to steal water also makes it a good preservative, since it can steal water from the cells of bacteria, killing them and preventing spoilage.

Sometimes you don't want sugar to take water from other parts of the recipe, because it interferes with processes that you want to take place. For example, if there's too much sugar in a lemon pie filling that uses cornstarch as a thickener, the sugar can deprive the starch of the liquid it needs to swell and thicken properly. (For a discussion on starches, see *Fine Cooking* #5, p. 18.)

## SUGAR BLOCKS PROTEIN BONDING, MAKING TENDER BAKED GOODS AND SMOOTH SAUCES

When the cook adds water to flour and stirs, two proteins in the flour—glutenin and gliadin—join together with the water to form elastic sheets of gluten. Fats can prevent gluten formation by coating the flour proteins so they can't join effectively. Sugar achieves the same goal of blocking protein bonding by combining with the flour proteins before they have a chance to join each other and form gluten.

You may have noticed that yeast breads, which need gluten for their risen structure, don't contain much sugar. With any more than two tablespoons of sugar per cup of flour, gluten is destroyed and yeast breads get very heavy. Quick breads, cakes, and muffins, on the other hand, aren't meant to have a chewy, "webby" crumb structure like yeast breads. They're leavened with chemical leavens—baking soda and baking powder. Stretchy sheets of gluten would hold down the carbon dioxide bubbles produced by these leavens, but quick breads generally contain about the same weight of sugar as flour, so gluten proteins can't join, and the quick breads remain light and tender.

**You'll see this tenderizing effect in pastries, too.** For example, *pâte sablée*, which is the most crumbly of the French



*More sugar means more browning. The only difference in these rolls is their sugar content.*





*Sorbet too icy? Not enough sugar, so the ice crystals are massing together.*



*Too soft to scoop? Too much sugar, which lowers the freezing point.*



*This sorbet has a perfect texture, thanks to the right amount of sugar.*

pie pastries, has a very high proportion of sugar which, along with butter, produces a tender, “sandy” (*sablée*) texture. In low-fat baked goods, you can’t get tenderness by shortening the gluten with butter or oil, so many recipes rely on sugar, whether in the form of puréed fruit or corn syrup. Many sugars from fruit are fructose, which again is the most hygroscopic sugar and which helps the items stay moist.

**Sugar makes smoother sauces.** Just as sugar interferes with the joining of gluten proteins, it also blocks the formation of tightly joined clumps of proteins in preparations like egg- or cream-based sauces. During cooking, the bonds that keep the proteins tightly coiled break, and some molecules unwind so their bonds stick out. One unwound protein runs into another, and the two bond together. In sauces and custards, if proteins are loosely joined, they thicken the mixture. If they bind very tightly, they form curds.

Some sugar molecules, especially sucrose (table sugar), are pretty big, and they can get in the way of these unwinding and binding proteins. This can dramatically slow down the joining of proteins, which means cooking time is longer and there’s less risk of curdling.

The amount of sugar in a recipe makes a noticeable difference in how carefully you must heat the dish to prevent curdling. A custard with a small amount of sugar should be heated in a double boiler with constant stirring to keep the protein bonding nice and slow. But recipes that contain a lot of sugar, like some lemon curd recipes, can be prepared on direct, very low heat if you use a heavy pan and stir constantly for even heat distribution. (For more on protein curdling, see *Fine Cooking* #2, p. 12).

**Sugar also gets in the way—mostly in a good way—when you freeze sweet mixtures** to make sorbets or other frozen desserts. Sugar lowers the freezing point of water. When a sorbet or ice-cream mixture (which contains dissolved sugar) freezes, tiny frozen water crystals—ice—form. As this water is converted to ice, it’s removed from the mixture; the remaining mixture becomes more and more concentrated in sugar. Finally you’re left with many fine ice crystals separated by a very concentrated sugar syrup that will not freeze at the freezer’s temperature, making the iced dessert soft enough to scoop. If you have too little sugar in the recipe, there’s too much ice and not enough unfrozen syrup left to soften, and it will take an ice pick to chip it apart. On the other hand, if you have too much sugar, there will be too much unfrozen syrup left, and you’ll have a soft, mushy mess.

**Sugar keeps fruit from “dissolving.”**

Another example of how sugar affects the texture of food is the way it helps keep cooked fruit and vegetables firm. When plant products are heated, their cells soften and leak. Insoluble “pectic substances” that served as the cement holding the cells together turn into soluble pectins and wash away, allowing the cells to fall apart. While we cook fruit and vegetables to make them more tender, we don’t usually want them to turn to mush. Sugar preserves these pectic substances, preventing them from becoming soluble compounds. Remember this effect of sugar on fruit when you poach fruit. Poach delicate fruit in a sugar syrup to keep the shape of the fruit. Cook firm fruit in water to tenderize first, and then stir in some sugar so the softening doesn’t go too far.

## SUGAR MAKES FOOD BROWN TWO WAYS

Think of the difference between a poached chicken breast and a grilled one, boiled potatoes and fried potatoes, a slice of buttered bread and a slice of buttered toast. The darker color and deeper, more complex fragrance and flavor of browned foods are due to sugar’s changing during two processes. First, sugar caramelizes. At around 340°F, it melts, turns from clear to amber to deep brown, and begins to break down chemically to produce new flavor compounds, most of which are very appealing.

But sugar helps food brown in a more complex reaction also, called the Maillard reaction. Everything from baked goods to fried foods gets this rich-tasting brown coating from complex chemical reactions caused by heating sugars and the amino acids in proteins. The more sugar and protein in an ingredient, the browner it will get. Brioche, which contains sugar and protein from eggs, bakes to a deep brown, while French bread, with no sugar and only flour proteins, is much paler.

Browning, tenderizing, making smooth sauces and ice creams, preventing spoilage and staleness—these are just some of the roles that sugar plays in cooking. It also affects how gelatin, jams, and jellies set, whether cookies are crunchy or soft, and whether your fudge is fabulous or a flop. There’s another critical role played by sugar that I haven’t discussed but which shouldn’t ever be overlooked: it makes things taste good.

*Shirley O. Corriher teaches food science and cooking classes across the country. She is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.* ♦

Here we show off the work of cooks who are good at showing off their food. The featured cook selects a few signature dishes and explains how each one is assembled and presented.

# A Measure of Whimsy

by Thomas Keller, chef/owner, The French Laundry Restaurant, Yountville, California



**Coffee & Doughnuts.** This French Laundry signature dessert is a whimsical twist on the classic American breakfast of coffee and doughnuts. The “coffee,” a rich cappuccino semifreddo, is topped with a dollop of steamed milk. I like the temperature contrast between the warm milk and partially frozen mousse. A just-fried doughnut and doughnut hole, lightly tossed in cinnamon sugar, are served alongside with a few scorched cinnamon sticks, which add their own aromatic punch to this delightful dessert.



**Saddle & Rack of Rabbit Wrapped in Apple-Wood-Smoked Bacon with Roasted Fennel & Fennel-Seed Oil.** A loin of rabbit, boned and divided into three parts—saddle, rack, and kidney—is the starting point for this popular main course at The French Laundry. The saddle is wrapped in a thin slice of bacon; the rack is carefully frenched to reveal the tiny rib bones; and I skewer the kidney with a dry fennel branch. Once roasted, the saddle is trimmed, set on one end, and lightly sauced with tarragon-scented rabbit stock. A sliced fennel bulb (which is roasted with the saddle) supports the kidney, and the rack crowns the saddle. A drizzle of fennel-seed oil and a light dusting of roasted fennel-seed powder finish the presentation.



**Herb-Roasted Maine Lobster with Whipped Yukon Gold Potatoes & Beet Essence.** Pan-roasted lobster meat seasoned with thyme, bay leaf, and rosemary is the centerpiece of this lavish main course. The sauce, a reduction of beet juice seasoned with vinegar and enriched with butter, is spattered across the plate. A fried potato spiral makes a delicious container for a creamy purée of potatoes, and a crisp potato lattice perches on top to add height to the dish. ♦



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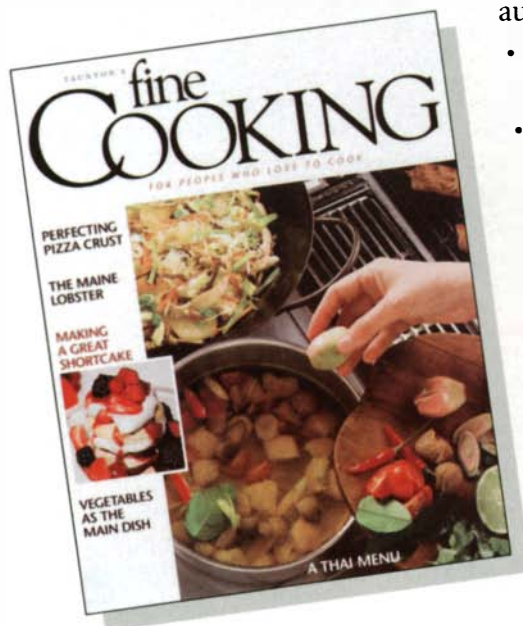
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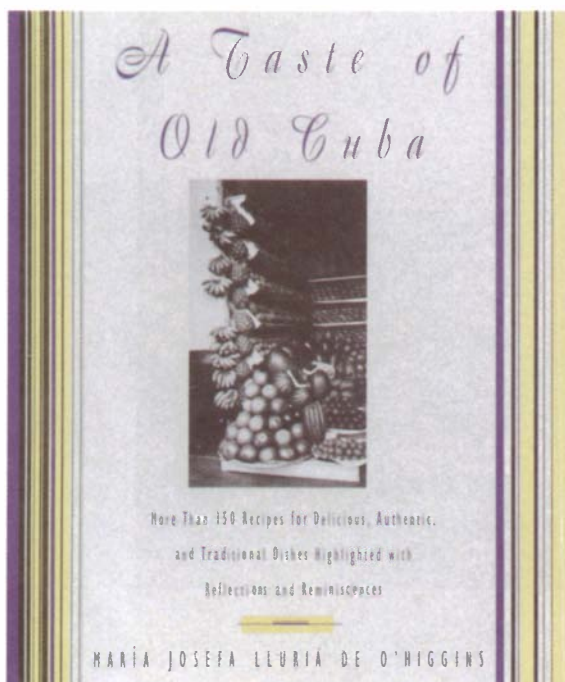
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# Cuban Cookbooks

BY JORGE ARANGO



When I was growing up in Miami Beach in the 1960s, Ocean Drive was a stretch of dilapidated art-deco retirement homes. Today, those homes have been renovated into posh hotels, gleaming with fresh coats of paint in vivid Caribbean colors. Cafés are full of stylish, beautiful people, and a tropical carnival atmosphere is as palpable and pervasive as the salt air. Wolfie's Kosher Deli, favorite haunt of Ocean Drive's retiree set, has ceded popularity to restaurants that serve heavily Latin-influenced fare. Versace is in, and the smell of syrupy-sweet Cuban coffee is everywhere. The influx of Cuban immigrants has transformed the city from a retirement mecca into the gateway to Latin America. Not surprisingly, this interest in Cuban culture has spawned several cookbooks on the Cuban cuisine.

Don't be fooled by her Irish last name: Maria Josefa Lluria de O'Higgins' book, *A Taste of Old Cuba* (HARPERCOLLINS, 1994. \$25, HARDCOVER; 280 PP. ISBN 0-06-016964-8), is as authentic as they come. All the tastes of

my childhood are here. They're in the *Bacalao a la Viscaína*, a salt-cod dish that's bathed in pimiento. They're in the *Ropa Vieja* (literally "old clothes") as well—a boiled, shredded, and then spiced brisket that comes as close to a national dish as any in Cuban cooking. Atypically, O'Higgins' recipe calls for roasting the green peppers—with delicious, slightly smoky results. Her cousin Juan's black beans are among the richest I've tasted. A roasted fresh ham brought back memories of ones my grandfather used to marinate in his special *mojo*, a mixture of garlic, sour-orange juice, and oregano.

The recipes range from simple (Puréd Plantain Soup) to very involved (a roast suckling pig that's marinated and cooked for 10 hours). Of course, finding all the Latin ingredients the author calls for may be a lot more difficult than she lets on. To her credit, O'Higgins offers substitutes whenever possible (a 50/50 mixture of lime and orange juice will do just fine if you can't find sour cooking oranges). The book also includes a helpful glossary for newcomers to Cuban cuisine.

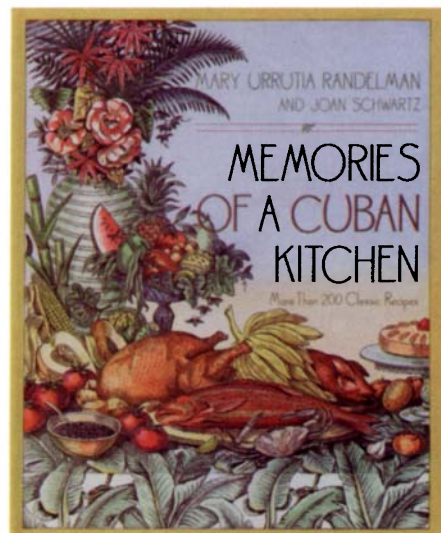
Her family stories paint a nostalgic portrait of a place and time my exiled parents never tire of recalling. The book is both a personal historical document and a collection of classic Cuban recipes. It's well worth the reading as well as the eating.

Like O'Higgins, Mary Urrutia Randelman is a native of Cuba, and her book, *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen* (COWRITTEN BY JOAN SCHWARTZ. MACMILLAN, 1992. \$25, HARDCOVER; 334 PP. ISBN 0-02-600911-0), is also a personal history with classic recipes. With beautiful, informative prose, Randelman provides evocative accounts of a *merienda* (an afternoon meal composed entirely of appetizers and desserts), of life on her godfather's 1,500-acre tobacco farm, of her great-grandmother's cattle ranch, and of the family cook Rosalie's indulgences. The author paints a vivid picture of mealtime rituals in Cuba before the revolution.

Though there are over 225 mostly very good recipes here, this book is equally important as a memoir that helps put Cuban cuisine in perspective. Randelman's family was evidently quite wealthy, but she has gone out of her way to represent all levels of the island's cuisine: from the simple egg dishes that were

frequent children's fare, to hearty stews created by Afro-Cuban farm hands, to the more sophisticated European-style *bocaditos* ("tiny mouthfuls") that those in Randelman's privileged circle nibbled on during formal affairs at the Havana Yacht Club.

The recipes are delicious. The *Pataje de Pescado* (fish soup) is as easy as it is refreshing. Enjoyable cold or hot, its fishiness is balanced by a mellow tartness that comes from just the right amount of lemon, lime, tomatoes, and cumin. The delectable Baked Whole Snapper Basque Style, marinated in Spanish olive oil, garlic, and lime, is impressively presented with tomatoey *sofrito* (the onion

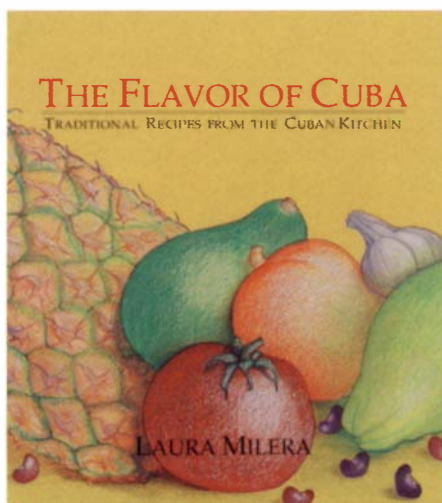


and green-pepper sauté that's the basis for many Cuban dishes) on a bed of thinly sliced potatoes. Her *Caldo Gallego* (Galician Bean Soup) is less greasy than others I've had and includes green pepper, which adds a pleasant flavor that lightens up the heaviness of the ham, pork, and *chorizo*.

Occasionally, recipes don't work as written. The ham croquette recipe is a little salty and needs considerably more flour. Though she says to let the mixture cool completely before rolling it in bread crumbs and frying, with so little flour it's really necessary to chill it thoroughly. Otherwise, no matter how expert you are, the croquettes will fall apart in the oil.

Fortunately, oversights like this are an exception. Cooks who are serious about Cuban cuisine should have both this and O'Higgins' book in their library.





Just out is *The Flavor of Cuba*, by Laura Milera. (ROYAL PALM PRESS, 1995. \$23.95, SOFTCOVER, 190 PP. ISBN 0-9642941-7-6). This book is obviously a much more modest project than either O'Higgins' or Randelman's: there are fewer recipes, less illustrative text, and minimal photography. Yet what it lacks in production values, it makes up for in good, easy-to-follow recipes developed by the author over her years as a caterer in Havana. And, although you won't find much here that isn't in the other two texts, there are some notably delicious concoctions.

Milera's Red Kidney Bean Soup, studied with chunks of potato and squash, is a smoky and satisfying hearty meal in itself that delivers everything you expect in a really good bean dish. Her ham croquettes work better than Randelman's and, thankfully, she states explicitly to chill them for at least three hours before rolling them. Spicy Shrimp in Wine Sauce (which she calls, oddly, "*Enchilada*" de Camarones despite an absence of tortillas or cheese) is a cinch, yet it's suffused with a heady wine flavor that makes it sophisticated enough to serve as a company dish. So, though I wouldn't say Milera's is the definitive Cuban cookbook, it's certainly respectable and—as in the case of the above examples—often truly shines.

An American friend once told me that while she was proud of her tomato sauce, our Italian friend Joanie could take exactly the same ingredients and somehow make a better sauce. It was in the blood, she implied. Whether this is true or not, two other Cuban cookbooks

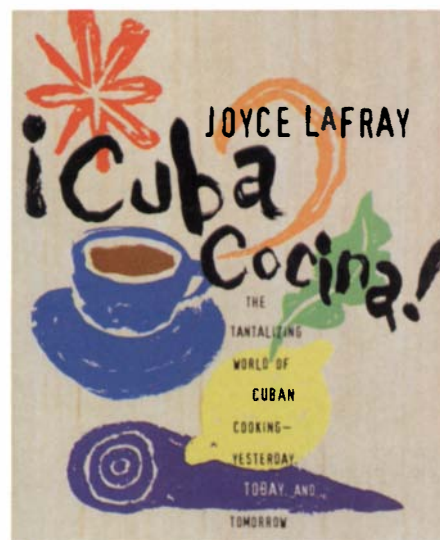
seem to corroborate her theory that those who grow up with a particular cuisine know it best.

*A Taste of Cuba: Recipes from the Cuban-American Community*, by Linette Creen (PENGUIN, 1994. \$10.95, SOFTCOVER, 322 PP. ISBN 0-452-27089-8), when judged by its own standards, is not at all bad. Creen, the author of two seafood cookbooks, qualifies the recipes as coming from "the Cuban-American community," and thus gets herself off the sharp, pointy hook of authenticity.

With that in mind, Creen creates some dishes that succeed on a "fusion" level. Crispy Fried Marinated Chicken, cubed chicken breasts soaked in garlic and sour-orange juice and fried, taste like pleasantly Cubanized Chicken McNuggets. Ironically, she offers no alternative to the sour-orange juice, even though many Cuban Americans now routinely substitute the lime-orange mixture. But never mind: the dish is right in the sense that so much Cuban food depends on a balance of salty and sweet ingredients. A Cream of Garlic Soup with Cilantro is too creamy, but fine. Tamale Pie, though bland and more Mexican than Cuban (she uses chili powder and canned jalapeños, neither a Cuban staple), is adequate if not interesting.

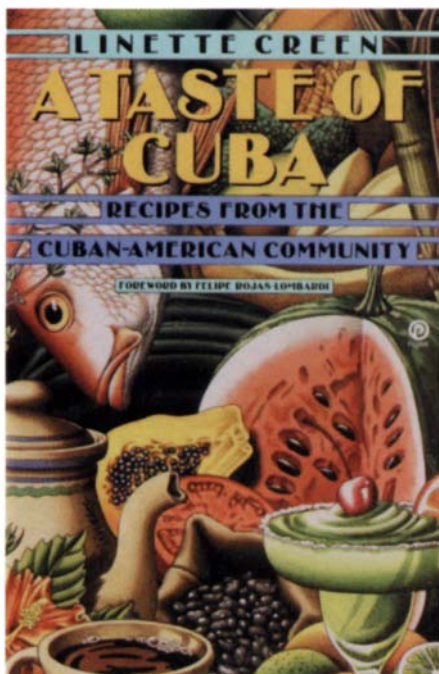
Sometimes Creen is totally off-base. Her *Bistec de Palomilla*, a traditionally marinated, fried steak served with onions, is neither marinated nor accompanied by

onions. She also has an aversion to salt. "I leave the amount of salt and pepper added to your discretion," she admits, but the result is that many dishes seem downright insipid. Creen makes wide use of *achiote* oil, an ingredient no self-respecting Cuban cook I know would ever use (it's Mexican). Cilantro, too, isn't nearly as common in Cuban cooking as she claims. If you're looking for a low-sodium cookbook with some Latin flair, fine—but if you want authentic Cuban cuisine, pass this one up.



Joyce Lefray's *iCuba Cocina!* (WILLIAM MORROW, 1994. \$25, HARDCOVER, 260 PP. ISBN 0-688-11067-3) is a misguided attempt to modernize Cuban food. Lefray's version of Cuban cooking is unnecessarily complicated (lots of slicing and dicing), which is ironic for a cuisine that generally depends on very simple techniques and a handful of seasonings. Despite a statement in her introduction that she has adjusted excess salt and fat in traditional recipes with "healthful measures," many of her interpretations of classic Cuban dishes are excessively greasy and oversalted. Authentic Cuban food is well seasoned and flavorful. Her careless misrepresentation of my culture's cuisine simply contributes to stereotypes about Latin American cooking.

Jorge Arango is a food and travel writer who cooks and eats authentic Cuban food in his home in Greenwich Village, New York. ♦



# Soy Sauce

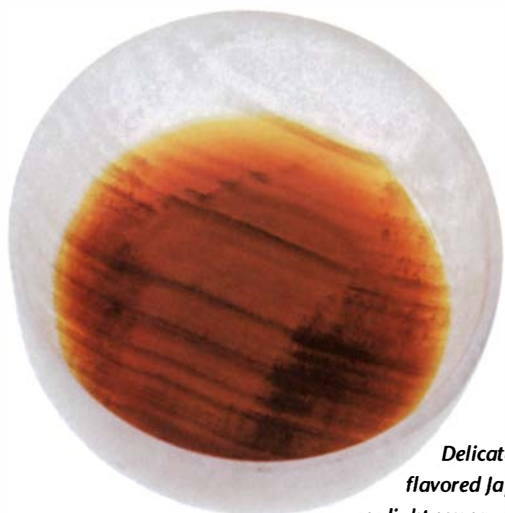
BY NICOLE ROUTHIER



*Strong, syrupy Chinese-style dark soy sauce is an acquired taste.*



*Japanese dark soy sauce is appropriate for all types of Asian cooking.*



*Delicately flavored Japanese light soy sauce is rarely found in the U.S. except in some Japanese food stores.*

Whether it's found in a packet in a bag of Chinese takeout or in a sauce at a trendy "fusion" restaurant, soy sauce is the ubiquitous Asian condiment. Essential to the flavor of not only Japanese and Chinese food but also to cuisines throughout Asia and the Pacific, soy sauce is becoming more and more popular with cooks in the West as well. Americans are certainly familiar with the taste of soy sauce, but most aren't aware that there are different types of soy sauce, nor do they understand how to use them. China and Japan are the major producers of authentic soy sauce, and companies in each country make their own very different styles of the condiment. Within each major style, there are also light, dark, and even "lite" soy sauces.

**No matter the style, all soy sauce begins with soybeans, wheat, and mold.** A combination of roasted soybean meal and ground wheat is injected with aspergillus mold and left to develop for several days. The cultured meal is then mixed with brine and yeast and transferred to tanks where it ferments for anywhere from six months to four years, depending on the manufacturer's practice. The liquids are then drained off, strained, and bottled.

Japanese manufacturers use more wheat than the Chinese to make their soy sauce, and this accounts for its mellower, less salty flavor. Dark soy, with its deep brown color and soft, fruity aroma, is the type used most often in Japan. Japanese light soy spends less time in fermentation tanks and is paler, with a milder flavor than the dark. Cooks in southwestern Japan, where the cuisine is very light and delicate, favor it because it adds flavor but not color.

Chinese-style soy sauces are generally saltier and have a much stronger flavor than the sweeter, mellower Japanese soy sauces. The Chinese sauces range from very thick, dark, paste-like mixtures to some that are quite thin and lightly colored. A bit of molasses gives their dark soy a slightly sweet flavor. The Chinese also make mushroom soy sauce, which is dark soy sauce flavored with straw mushrooms.

**In both countries, light soy sauces are saltier than dark.** An easy way to distinguish between the two is to shake the bottle. Dark soy sauce will coat the sides of the bottle; the more watery light soy won't.

Tamari sauce is made much the same way as soy sauce is but without wheat.

I find its flavor unpleasantly metallic. Reduced-sodium soy sauces are just an excuse for health food stores to charge ridiculous prices. If you're sensitive to sodium, you'll get more flavor by simply diluting a good-quality soy sauce with water, broth, or wine than by buying a more expensive "lite" product which has little taste.

Avoid artificially produced soy sauces that are invading our supermarket shelves. Unlike Japanese or Chinese companies that brew their soy sauce according to the centuries-old process, American manufacturers often take shortcuts, mixing soy protein with water, corn syrup, salt, and caramel color to produce a harsh, salty liquid that has none of the complexity and richness of a good-quality soy sauce. To discern authentic brands, look for the words "naturally brewed" on the label.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT SOY SAUCE

The deep color and strong, sweet-salty taste of Chinese dark soy sauce is well paired with hearty foods that won't be overwhelmed by its powerful color and flavor. Meats and "red-cooked" dishes, in which foods are braised slowly to develop an appetizing reddish brown color, are good choices for dark soy sauce. Light Chinese soy sauce is well matched with more subtly flavored foods, such as seafood, vegetables, and poultry dishes. Use it, too, for dipping sauces and marinades. While Chinese-style soy sauces are indispensable in some traditional recipes, they're certainly not to everyone's taste, and they'll overwhelm the flavor of subtler Japanese and Southeast Asian dishes. Mushroom soy sauce—often used to flavor meat or vegetable stir-fries—is delicious, but its flavor is quite potent. Use it sparingly.

**Japanese dark soy sauce is the most versatile** for Western dishes as well as for traditional Asian food. To my taste, Kikkoman is the best all-purpose soy sauce. Made by a Japanese company in Wisconsin, this Japanese-style soy sauce has a well-rounded, complex flavor with a slightly sweet aftertaste. I recommend it for all types of cooking.

*Nicole Routhier has won awards for her two cookbooks, The Foods of Vietnam and Cooking Under Wraps. Her third book, on cooking with fruit, will be published this fall by Workman. ♦*



*Sponsoring an event that you want readers to know about? Send an announcement to Calendar, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Be sure to include dates, a complete address, and the phone number to call for more information. Listings are free, but restricted to events of direct interest to cooks. The deadline for entries in the October/November issue is July 1.*

## ARKANSAS

**Festival**—39th Annual Bradley County Pink Tomato Festival, June 8–10, Court Square, Warren. For information, call 501/226-5225.

## CALIFORNIA

**Auction**—15th Annual Napa Valley Wine Auction, June 8–11, Meadowood Resort Hotel, St. Helena. For information, call 707/942-9783, ext. 901.

**Seminar**—Perspectives on Healthy Traditional Diets: The Health Show, June 15–17, Anaheim. Call Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust at 617/695-2300.

**Festival**—8th Annual French Festival, July 15–16, Oak Park, Santa Barbara. A celebration of French cuisine and culture. Call Steve Hoegerman at 805/569-1636.

**Beer Festival**—Small Brewers Festival of California, July 15–16, downtown Mountain View. Benefit event featuring over 40 microbrewers from California and over 150 different beers. Call Pat Figueroa at 415/965-4783.

**Auction**—15th Annual Sonoma County Showcase & Wine Auction, July 27–30, several winery locations in Sonoma County. Call 707/586-3795.

**Festival**—17th Annual Gilroy Garlic Festival, July 28–30, Christmas Hill Park, Gilroy. Call 408/842-1625.

## COLORADO

**Festival**—1995 Food & Wine Magazine Classic at Aspen, June 16–18. Call 800/4WINE95.

## FLORIDA

**Fair**—Southwest Florida Wine Fair, June 2–4, South Seas Plantation, Captiva Island. Call 800/237-3102.

## HAWAII

**Festival**—4th Annual Big Island Bounty Festival, June 9–11, Ritz-Carlton, Mauna Lani, Kohala Coast. For information, call 800/845-9905.

## LOUISIANA

**Festival**—4th Annual New Orleans Wine & Food Experience, July 27–30, The Fairmont Hotel, New Orleans. For information, call 504/529-WINE.

## MAINE

**Festival**—48th Annual Maine Lobster Festival, August 3–6, Harbor Park, Rockland. For a festival brochure and an area guide, call 800/LOB-CLAW.

## MASSACHUSETTS

**Festival**—Ipswich United Methodist Church Strawberry Festival, June 17, Ipswich. For information, call Janice Knowles at 508/356-4561.

## MICHIGAN

**Festival**—National Asparagus Festival, June 9–11, Hart. Food show featuring asparagus dishes. Call Kathy Walicki or Joy Hamilton at 616/873-2129.

**Seminars & Tastings**—1st Annual Culinary Classic, June 24, Oakland Community College, Farmington Hills. Guest speakers include Jimmy Schmidt, Fred & Linda Griffith, Madeline Triffon, and Milos Cihelka. Call 810/471-6340.

**Festival**—National Cherry Festival, July 8–15, Traverse City. Call 616/947-4230.

## NEVADA

**Festival**—32nd National Basque Festival, July 1–2, Elko City Park. For information, call 702/738-7991.

## NEW YORK

**Seminars**—Mediterranean in America: Traditional Foods & Cooking of Turkey, June 10–15, Intercontinental Hotel, New York City. Call Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust at 617/695-2300.

**Convention**—American Culinary Federation National Convention, July 15–19, Marriott Marquis Hotel, New York City. For information, call Tracy Barrett at 904/824-4468, extension 110.

## OREGON

**Beer Festival**—9th Annual Oregon Brewers Festival, July 28–30, Waterfront Park, Portland. Beer samples from 60 breweries in the U.S. and Canada. Call 503/778-5917.

## PENNSYLVANIA

**Festival**—5th Annual Great Tastes of Pennsylvania Wine & Food Festival, June 24–25, Split Rock Resort, Lake Harmony. Call 800/255-7625.

## RHODE ISLAND

**Cook-Off**—14th Annual Schweppes Great Chowder Cook-Off, June 10, Newport Yachting Center, Newport. Over 25 restaurants compete for the title of Best Chowder in New England. Call Lynda Tobin at 401/846-1600, ext. 290.

## VIRGINIA


**Festival**—14th Annual Virginia Wineries Festival, June 3–4, Great Meadow Field Events Center, The Plains. Call 800/277-CORK.

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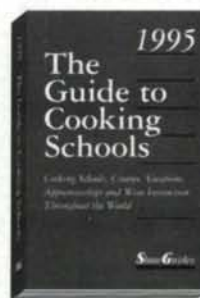
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## NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Pizza with Prosciutto & Arugula	31	480	43%	18	50	23	6	13	2	35	1450	3	¼ pizza
Spaghetti with Arugula & Tomato	32	460	32%	15	63	16	5	8	2	20	370	4	
Tagliata con Rucola	32	540	68%	38	7	41	9	26	3	95	1700	3	
Potato Cakes	35	80	40%	1	11	3.5	0.5	2.0	1.0	0	180	1	
Italian White Bean Cakes	35	160	31%	7	22	5	1	3	1	0	200	6	
Sweet-Potato Cakes	35	180	25%	3	32	5	0	3	1	0	370	4	
Cucumber & Fennel Gratin	38	170	66%	7	9	13	8	4	0	35	490	4	
Warm Cucumber & Shrimp Salad	39	240	49%	24	7	13	2	9	2	185	750	2	
Swordfish with Cucumber & Red Pepper	39	270	57%	22	7	17	6	8	2	60	290	1	
Cucumbers with Prosciutto & Cream	40	210	79%	5	8	18	11	5	1	65	420	2	
Cream Cheese Torta	43	210	85%	6	3	20	11	6	2	55	200	1	
Orange, Olive & Fennel Salad	46	120	35%	2	20	4.5	0.5	3.0	0.5	0	180	4	2 Tbs. vinaigrette
Herb Salad with Roasted Vegetables	46	320	74%	3	20	27	4	20	3	0	630	5	2 Tbs. vinaigrette
Grilled Mushroom Salad	47	290	77%	10	9	25	6	16	2	15	830	2	2 Tbs. vinaigrette
Sopa de Pimiento	52	70	54%	2	7	4.0	1.0	2.5	0.5	5	570	1	
Fricasé con Pollo	52	400	58%	27	13	26	6	13	4	95	740	1	
Tostones	53	160	44%	1	24	8	1	5	2	0	180	2	
Buñuelos de Maíz	53	260	42%	6	34	12	1	7	4	70	290	2	
Torta de Queso con Mango	54	310	49%	11	31	17	10	5	1	175	150	1	
Raspberry Pie	59	390	48%	5	47	21	11	7	2	90	260	4	⅛ pie
Chicken Consommé	63	40	23%	4	1	1.0	0.5	0.5	0	0	780	0	
Lemony Corn Chaat	65	70	10%	2	15	1.0	0	0	0.5	0	410	3	
Chickpea & Arugula Salad	66	250	17%	12	42	4.5	0.5	1.5	1.5	0	510	8	
Fruit Salad with Chile-Lime Dressing	67	80	17%	1	16	1.5	0	1.0	0.5	0	140	3	
Tangy Potato Chaat	67	110	0%	4	26	0	0	0	0	0	300	3	
Grilled Chile-Rubbed Skate with Salad	70	420	53%	31	19	24	2	11	6	80	390	3	
Citrus-Marinated Skate Salad with Aioli	71	270	56%	17	14	17	3	10	2	95	350	3	2 Tbs. aioli
Cornmeal-Fried Skate Wings	72	480	45%	35	34	24	3	11	5	80	830	2	
Passionfruit Pavlova	75	340	47%	3	44	18	11	5	1	65	60	2	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

# A Different Kind of Wedding

From the moment my fiancée and I decided to have a pig roast at our wedding, our preparations bore little resemblance to those of most engaged couples.

As I was the designated chef, I soon became absorbed with a series of problems I had never considered before when I'd looked forward to my own wedding: where to find whole pigs, and where and how to cook them.

Finding the pigs was the easy part. Our wedding was to take place on my fiancée's brother's land in Vermont, right on the Canadian border. That's good farm country, and I quickly found a butcher who reserved two pigs for us from a local farmer. Of course, reserving pigs in April for an August wedding is akin to speculating on the agricultural futures market, but I was assured that the farmer would easily have two pigs that would both weigh around 50 pounds.

Figuring out where to cook the pigs was more difficult. My brother-in-law and his wife own 30 acres of land, both woods and fields, so it was a matter of deciding whether we wanted an imitation of Robin Hood's forest feasts, or something closer to an open-field harvest celebration. To minimize the chance of a major forest fire, we opted to cook the pigs in a meadow near the house.

Not unexpectedly, the most difficult problem to solve was how to cook a whole pig. Though we were both experienced restaurant cooks, neither my fiancée nor I had ever tackled anything so "industrial" as an entire pig, complete with hooves and head and regrettably endearing snout. Our combined experience, however, did enable us to consult with any number of self-proclaimed experts. Naturally, all the expert opinions were different, and none of them quite applied to our specific situation. It quickly



become obvious that this most celebratory meal of our lives, with the 75 people most near and dear to us, was going to be a complete improvisation.

That my wedding had become a culinary experiment was finally driven home

## Finding the pigs was the easy part.

to me when my fiancée's uncle and I went to collect the pigs. Under the blistering sun, we slid the two chilled pigs into the back of our pickup and watched the ice begin to melt. With another day to go before I could begin cooking, I realized with a sinking feeling that my wedding

banquet might easily become a giant bout of food poisoning.

Even my fiancée's uncle, a man of many experiences, shook his head and confessed to never having seen anything "quite like this."

"Now what do we do?" I asked the butcher.

"Hey, I've done my part," he said, turning back to his business.

In the end, the pigs survived until mealtime, and the guests survived the meal. From start to finish, it was a homegrown affair.

We dug the pit, lined it with rocks, had a bonfire that night, and, early in the morning, set the pigs over well-seasoned wood on homemade, eight-foot spits. Many guests were happy to help, basting the meat with beer and barbecue sauce right up until dinner in the midafternoon.

And, despite my fears, I realized halfway through the morning that attempting something so extravagant was the perfect way to get married. I was so wrapped up with the preparations that I never had time to grapple with the usual terrors of making a lifelong commitment.

Half an hour before the ceremony, I was still grimy from the days of preparation. Within minutes of the kiss and exchange of rings, I was back making sure my time away hadn't jeopardized the meal.

My new wife understood. In fact, she was envious because while I had the pleasure of creating a meal I'd always wanted and never tried, she was left with the traditional concerns of guests and arrangements and maintaining an even keel.

We'll have another pig roast, someday, perhaps on a major anniversary. But things will be a little different. Part of my vow to my wife on our wedding day was that, next time, she gets to prepare the feast.

—Jeffrey C. Rowe  
Bowdoinham, Maine ♦



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# Retro cook look

The brilliant graphics in these promotional cookbooks were what hooked Martha Spelman ten years ago when she began collecting them. An artists' rep from Culver City, California, she has more than 300 of these illustrated softcover books, gleaned from swap meets, used book stores, and antique shops.



## BIRTHDAY CAKE

- |                    |                                  |                 |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 3/4 cup shortening | 3 1/2 cups GOLD MEDAL Cake Flour | 1 1/2 cups milk |
| 2 cups sugar       | 1 1/2 tsp. flavoring             |                 |
| 1/4 tsp. salt      | 5 tsp. baking powder             | 5 egg whites    |
1. Cream the shortening and add the sugar gradually.
  2. Sift the flour once before measuring.
  3. Mix and sift the flour, salt and baking powder, and add alternately with the milk.
  4. Add the flavoring—vanilla and almond together are good.
  5. Fold in the stiffly beaten egg whites.
  6. Pour into well greased and floured pans and bake. Cool and frost with pink and white icing.
- TIME**—1 hour 30 minutes.  
**TEMPERATURE**—350 F., medium oven.  
**SIZE OF PAN**—1 two 3-inch layer pans or three 6-inch layer pans.
- NOTE:** (See Comfort Cooks). Part of icing may be colored pink with vegetable coloring matter and used on sides of cake with white icing on top and between layers. Pink candles to match sides can be placed on top of cake for birthday party.